Buffalo Nationalism

A Critique of Spiritual Fascism

Kancha Ilaiah

SHOUT
SHARE
IT

Buffalo Nationalism

Kancha Ilaiah

Also by the author

WHY I AM NOT A HINDU: A Sudra Critique of Hindutva Philosophy, Culture and Political Economy

GOD AS POLITICAL PHILOSOPHER: Buddha’s Challenge to Brahminism

BUFFALO NATIONALISM
A Critique of Spiritual Fascism

KANCHA ILAIAH

BUFFALO NATIONALISM: A Critique of Spiritual Fascism was first published in January 2004 by SAMYA, an imprint of Bhatkal and Sen
16 Southern Avenue, Kolkata 700 026

© 2004 Samya
ISBN 81-85604-69-X

All rights reserved.
No part of this book may be reproduced or utilized in any form or by any means without prior written permission from the publisher.

Distributed by Popular Prakashan Pvt Ltd. Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata

Typesetting and design by Compuset International 85 Park St, Kolkata 700 016
and printed by Webimpressions (India) Pvt Ltd 34/2 Beadon St, Kolkata 700 006

Published by Mandira Sen for SAMYA, An imprint of Bhatkal and Sen,
16 Southern Avenue, Kolkata 700 026

To all those who have suffered apartheid, untouchability, casteism, patriarchy and brutal atrocities because of
spiritual fascism. To all those who fought, wrote and dedicated themselves for their liberation. Liberation in this world is more important than salvation in heaven.

Contents

- Cover
- Also by the author
- Title Page
- Copyright
- Dedication
- Acknowledgements
- Introduction
- PART 1 On Communal Violence
    - 1 Ayodhya: What Stake Do OBCs Have?
    - 2 Consequences of the Call for Epic War
    - 3 Dalit, OBC and Muslim Relations
    - 4 The Rise of Modi
- PART 2 On Clash of Civilizations
    - 5 A Case of Slipping Morality
    - 6 A Lesson to Be Learnt
    - 7 The Invisible Country
    - 8 Heroes Who Made the World Rock and Roll
- PART 3 On Social Justice
    - 9 A Paradigm Shift
    - 10 Attacks on Ambedkar
    - 11 The Bard Whose Song Is His Weapon
    - 12 Countering the Counter-Revolution
    - 13 Hindutva and the War-Loving Self
    - 14 Spiritual Fascism and Civil Society
    - 15 Freedom Unattained

- PART 4 On Caste
  - 16 The Buffalo’s Unholy Milk
  - 17 Durban, Caste and Indian Democracy
  - 18 Secularism: The Predicament of OBCs
  - 19 Caste and Women’s Sexuality
  - 20 Caste Shadows in London
  - 21 Caste in a New Mould
- PART 5 On the Right to Religion
  - 22 Hinduism and the Right to Religion
  - 23 Reject the Oppressor
  - 24 Religion and Democracy
  - 25 Spiritual Democracy
  - 26 Where Should the Reform Begin?
- PART 6 On Electoral Politics
  - 27 Sonia, Swadeshi and Videshi
  - 28 The End of Dalit Ideology?
  - 29 Major Priorities
- PART 7 On Culture
  - 30 Cow and Culture
  - 31 Cows, Buffaloes and Nationalism
  - 32 Hinduism and Capitalist Ethics
  - 33 The Buddha Smiles in Afghanistan
- PART 8 On Globalization
  - 34 Cultural Globalization
  - 35 Dalits and Globalization
  - 36 Death Wish?
- PART 9 On Education
  - 37 A Lesson from African English
  - 38 Caste, Clinton and the IT Revolution

    - 39 Through Books, Ships and Sea
    - 40 Blacks, Science and National Pride
    - 41 Education and the Dignity of Labour
    - 42 Reservations: Experience as Framework of Debate

- Index

- Back Cover

Acknowledgements

My thanks are due to many institutions, organizations and individuals, who have helped and encouraged me in the course of writing these articles for many newspapers and journals in India. But for the willingness of many editors who allowed me to write, that too in a manner that I wanted to write, which often went against their papers' policy, many of these pieces would not have been written at all. Of course, such writing was/is being allowed or asked for because there is a new readership that has emerged from the social womb of DalitBahujans that wants to see its own image in contemporary media. A writer's role in a social movement is to reflect its newly made up face and see whether it changes the market value of the mirror itself. But for the positive encouragement of socially sensitive editors like Malini Parthasarathy of *The Hindu,* A. T. Jayanti of the *Deccan Chronicle* and my journalist friends like R. Akhileswari, the editor K. N. Shantha Kumar and associate editor A. V. Namboodiri, all of the *Deccan Herald*—perhaps the only OBC-controlled English newspaper—I would not have written these articles. 1 thank them for their support. The late Krishna Raj, editor of the *Economic and Political Weekly* encouraged my contributions. I deeply regret his untimely death. Sumit Chakravartty of *Mainstream* also published my writings. I have indeed been fortunate in my association with both these distinguished journals.

The journey of my writing continues. Sometimes some papers close their doors while other new ones open theirs. These encounters of pain and pleasure within the world of the media are part of a writer's life. When a writer challenges the world of the press owner's caste and class, these problems increase. Rejection of articles, abusive attacks from the anti-Dalit-Bahujan readers follow. If a newspaper publishes my article, I enjoy seeing and reading it like a child enjoys playing with a doll that its own hands have made. I have also received irrevocable rejections. Each has made me stronger rather than weaker. I am thankful to those editorial staff who edited my articles in these newspapers and journals as they improved their readability. I also thank those who rejected my articles as this strengthened my nerve.

After my book *Why I am Not a Hindu: A Sudra Critique of Hindutva Philosophy, Culture and Political Economy* was published in 1996 (Samya),

several reviews appeared and some of the editors of leading national newspapers were willing to publish my opinions on many current issues. Aakar Patel of *Mid-Day* told me that the book was a 'modern classic' and asked me to write for him. I thank him for the opportunity to do so. I cannot forget the sudden phone call from Malini Parthasarathv, the then executive editor of *The Hindu*, an English national daily, of one of the largest circulations. She asked me to contribute to *The Hindu*—particularly to their '50 Years of Independent India' special issue—in an autobiographical tone, tracing the events in independent India. I did so. That was the beginning of my intellectual engagement with that paper. I thank her for not only publishing many articles, for publishing several critical letters and also for putting up with many abusive letters as well.

In a brahminical environment, publishing my critique of Hinduism in a paper named *The Hindu* was certainly a tricky proposition and she did so with courage and conviction. I thank her for the risk she had willingly undertaken for an historical task of social transformation. As one of the boldest woman journalists in India she took the initiative to publish caste-related issues and put them up for debate in this country of the casteist elite. The RSS and its sister organizations took up a campaign not only against me but also against all my supporters in the media. Quite interestingly, many of my strong supporters in the media turned out to be women irrespective of their caste background. My publisher Mandira Sen took the initial risk. Then Malini Parthasarathv, A. T. Javanti, Sagarika Ghose, Burkha Dutt (who put me on the NDTV network time and again), Gita Ramaswamy (the publisher of my books in Telugu) all happen to be women. This put a major burden on me of continuing the Phule, Perivar and Ambedkar tradition of the liberation agenda of women along with the liberation of DalitBahujan social forces from caste, gender and class oppression as that is a 'three-in-one' mission of mine too.

Similarly, one day A. T. Jayanti, the editor of the *Deccan Chronicle,* called me to ask that I write for the newspaper. My articles attracted the most abusive letters from the Hindutva forces, which also pointed to the so-called collusionist approach of Jayanti as well. The Hindutva group have trained an army of letter writers, experts in using abusive language but not reasoned out arguments. Some attacked me in the most abusive language, which Jayanti printed, exposing the vulgarity of Hindutva abusive culture.

The title, *Buffalo Nationalism: A Critique of Spiritual Fascism* is carved out from the titles of my articles in the *Deccan Chronicle.* When I wrote the article

‘Spiritual Fascism and Civil Society’ in the *Deccan Chronicle* of 15 February 2000, it created a social uproar. The Hindutva forces—including some of their central ministers and also the brahminic teaching staff of my university—put pressure on my university to stop me writing. Professor D. C. Reddy, the then vice-chancellor, sent me a letter signed by his Registrar, Pannalal:

‘ This is with reference to some of your writings in popular newspapers. In your article ‘Spiritual Fascism and Civil Society’, … ***Deccan Chronicle,*** 15 February 2000, you have elaborated on Caste System in our country. As is well known to you the problems existing in society can always be viewed at from different perspectives and several actions can be initiated to eliminate/mitigate such social problems. Writing articles and debating on such issues is definitely an accepted Way in a civil society. While doing so, it is absolutely essential to bind ourselves within the basic canons of conduct of our profession.

‘Basically being teachers, we are bound to contribute towards upliftment… promote social harmony and emotional integration. We have to positively ensure that either our writings or any other action do not in any way lend a slant to accentuating exiting prejudices and inflame hatred ... You are requested to keep these in mind and discharge a role as a teacher with greater vigour and vitality to the betterment of the society as a whole.’

This letter was aimed at silencing my pen as long as I hung onto my teaching profession. The Osmania University Teachers Association (OUTA), academics and intellectuals across the country protested against this letter and demanded its withdrawal, as it impinged upon the basic right of freedom of expression of a citizen and the right to the academic freedom of a teacher. A strong national-level academic and civil rights protest got going and the letter was finally withdrawn by the university. I thank all those organizations, the individuals and the media who fought for my right to freedom of expression.

Dr. Jyotirmava Sharma, the former resident editor of the *Times of India,* Hyderabad, asked me to contribute some pieces. I am grateful to him and also to the *Times of India.* This volume contains articles that have appeared in *The Hindu,* the *Deccan Chronicle,* the *Deccan Herald, Mid-Day, The Hindustan Times, News Times, Outlook, Economic and Political Weekly*, *Mainstream* and *Biblio.* I thank all the editors and other friends who made my writings appear in these newspapers and journals.

Many friends made it a point to read, criticize and appreciate these articles. Professor P. L. Visweshar Rao, who teaches journalism at Osmania University, and Professor S. Simhadri of geography and Mr. Kondal Rao, a retired official. Dr. D. Ravinder, associate professor of political science, Dr. G Tirupathi Kumar, associate professor of English, B. Bhangya Naik, and J. Chinnaiah, assistant professors of history, all of Osmania University, and many others call me early morning, even before I see the paper, to tell me about their opinions on that day's article. It is good to have such friends who stand by you with a critical eye. I thank them too.

Finally, I must thank Mandira Sen and Rimi Chatterjee who helped me with the selection of these articles and in putting the book together. Communications went back and forth amongst the three of us to come up with the title, shape up the text, and finalize the cover. It was a pleasure to work with these two unusual Bengali women, whose commitment to DalitBahujan literature is as serious as that to women's literature. They seem to share not only my language and idiom but the anger and agony With pleasure I thank them once again.

I thank all my family members who stood by me in all my social struggles and also the long course of my writing.

Introduction

This book is an outcome of my occasional writings in several national newspapers. It therefore does not build a coherent argument, but

rather outlines the broad framework of thought in which many of

these articles have been written. I have been arguing for quite some time that religions have shaped the body and content of civil societies around the globe, which in turn have determined their level of cultural and civilizational progress, on the basis of which state systems have evolved, developed, or perished. If a society has managed to evolve a coherent and reasonably democratic religion, it has also tended to evolve more egalitarian socio-political systems.

So far the world has witnessed and experienced four major religions and the socio-spiritual systems that have been produced. They are Buddhism, Christianity, Islam and Hinduism. Of these four major

religions Buddhism, Christianity and Islam could broadly be characterized, based on the tenets they have constructed, as religions of spiritual democracy. They all have in common one democratic notion: that God created all human beings equal. However, in the process of their institutionalization, in other words, of the working out and applying of a code of conduct to human life, these religions have also evolved authoritarian tendencies and engaged in inhuman practices. They have used violence against individuals and groups who opposed them, both internally and also in the course of their expansion. Many barbaric atrocities have been committed in their name, but the principles that these religions codified in their books did give their followers the equal opportunity, regardless of rank though not of gender, to see the light of the books and also to dream and realize the ideals which arc upheld therein. In Buddhism, the very life of

Buddha—the first recorded formulator of a code of conduct—and the

principles of human life that were enshrined in the *Suttas* and the *Pitakas* that came into being based on the teachings of his lifetime, remained positive and non-violent guides to humanity. That was one

reason why Buddhism became the earliest international religion

reason why Buddhism became the earliest international religion.

There is not much evidence to indicate that in the course of the

expansion of Buddhism as a religion large-scale violence was used

against people who opposed it.

The nations that were built on some form of this spiritualdemocratic religion have developed a strong egalitarian tradition and many of them have shown serious interest in achieving human

equality in all spheres of life. China, as gigantic a nation as India, has evolved a strong sense of equality at the civil-societal level,

providing much scope for the state to evolve more positive institutions in our own times. Many features of the socialist ethic that the Chinese have come to respect can be traced to the Buddhist social

ethic combined with Confucian values. In spite of the faults and

abuses of actual practice, the respect that Chinese society has

given to Marx and Mao for enunciating the principle of the equality of all human beings must above all be seen in the background of that society's pre-existing Buddhist ethic.

The Buddhist ethic at the root of Chinese civil society made the Chinese determined positivists. Without a positivist social base generated by its historical formation, a society cannot develop a modernist egalitarian social base. The historical background of a society, in terms of its social ethic, determines its future as well. The positivist Buddhist ethic spread throughout the whole of East Asia much before Christianity evolved as a religion in the western corner of the continent. Christianity resembled Buddhism in constructing a positivist social ethic. One can see the points of similarity between Buddha's life and teachings and those of Jesus. Christianity today

commands the largest land mass and the greatest number of people

on the globe, and because of the apostolic example of Jesus and his

uncompromising negation of violence described in the book of religion that

uncompromising negation of violence described in the book of religion that came into being as the New Testament of the Bible, it expanded more rapidly than any other religion in the world. To date

the largest number of people in the world use the Bible and Jesus'

life to inspire their struggle for liberation from bondage, slavery and barbarity. This does not mean that the states that emerged as autonomous—even secular—nation-states from the social womb of Christianity did not use violence. They used barbaric violence, both against 'heretics' or dissenters within their own society, and 'infidels' or people of other cultures and faiths. While the Bible remained the base of

many of the constitutions of newly emerging nation-states—the concept of 'nation' itself was biblical—the political science that emerged to study the scope and nature of the state never treated Jesus as a

worthy instructor to guide in building a non-violent state, in spite of the fact that Jesus' teachings against violence have had immense

influence on people's lives, much more widely that that of his predecessor in non-violence, the Buddha. The fundamental spiritualdemocratic principle that God created all human beings equal was strongly propagated by Jesus, but the Buddha maintained silence on

the question of God as the creator and arbiter of human life. Since

Buddha never endorsed the notion of God, his preachings of equality were never structured in the language of godly spirituality; instead he used the concept of 'law' to uphold the moral order. In a world of believers in God, non-spiritual language has only a limited reach, and cannot appeal to the enthusiasm of the masses. However,

the basic principle that God created all human beings—men and

women—equal, set forth in the very first chapter of the Bible, remains the most spiritualdemocratic principle that Christianity as a religion has handed down to humanity, in spite of later attempts to dilute this message.

Then came Islam, again from the same Asian continent and claiming roots in the earlier tradition that produced Judaism and Christianity.

Though Islam has earned the image of spreading through the sword

the teachings of the book on which it is based, is as firm as the Bible on the notion of God creating all human beings equal. This notion

cemented the Islamic bond among its believers as one people. The

notion of oneness and also the strong belief that God was on their

side gave them the strength to conquer country after country. Such

campaigns of conquest also unleashed enormous violence. Today

distorted interpretations of Islam lead to terrorist attacks on the world and the oppression of women and dissenters within Islamic societies. But that does not undermine the commitment of the Quran, and Mohammed who was its prophetic author, to the idea of human equality as the basis of the spiritual thought of Islam.

There is a strong view that both the Bible and the Quran pronounced in favour of the permanent inequality of women and men. However

they never approved caste and colour differences and inequalities,

indeed they preached against them. In that sense the Bible and Quran are patriarchal but not racist and casteist. The patriarchal system that has been constructed in books of religion is a major hurdle for the

development of nations. Women's movements all over the world have

raised many fundamental questions with regard to the liberation of

women in both the worldly and the spiritual realm. How women's

movements will reformulate the tenets of patriarchal discourse in the Bible and the Quran is a question that must be left to the future.

The egalitarian discourse of Islam quickly faced a setback in the form of the survival of tribal identities among the early followers of the faith, and one of the major challenges that faced the early lawmakers of Islam was how to welcome

and accept new converts to the Prophet's religion. But the fact that Islam was so successful so quickly, and that it was soon the foremost promoter of art, science, literature, technology, trade and exploration, was largely due to people's faith in the equality and brotherhood it offered. After Islam came into being the Christian and Buddhist worlds had to yield space for it. What is more, as scholars are discovering, much of the impetus for Europe's

renaissance came from Islamic sources that had collected, preserved

and interpreted the remnants of Greek wisdom. Islam entered the

Hindu religious space without difficulty, and indeed soon proved to

be a conduit for Hindu science, mathematics and philosophy to reach

the West. Trade took the Muslims even further east, and within the

last millennium Indonesia, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh have been won over to Islam from the fold of Hinduism. But Hinduism

has not been able to expand to any small region that was already

occupied by other organized religions. Islam challenged even Christianity till the end of the sixteenth century in all spheres of life— including the fields of science and technology.

Christianity, it appears, had to struggle and evolve to beat Islamic organized oneness. After the capture of Constantinople the Christian world had to unify and become more organized to save its spiritual

and worldly hegemony in Europe. The Christian world's sense of itself as underdogs, intensified by military humiliation during the crusades, drove it to compete with Islam in culture, science and trade. From

this urge sprang the Renaissance and the Reformation, and the many

scientific and geographical discoveries of succeeding periods. Since then the dominance of the Christian world over people of other faiths has increased. The Christian world has come to represent modernity.

Nations acquire the ability to dominate others when social forces

Nations acquire the ability to dominate others when social forces

within them are united. Spiritual unity is the anchor around which

the other forms of unity are synthesized. India as a nation lost that scope because of Brahminism, which is at the core of Hinduism. It is very clear from the present direction of Hinduism that it is on the

way to its own extinction. The present Hindutva movement and the

BJP government instead of slowing down that process of extinction,

seem to be hastening it. Some of the articles in this volume show its trend and direction.

Hinduism was born out of a brahminic philosophy that stated that God created human beings unequal. This thesis was propounded in the Rig Veda itself. In this process the country and the people who suffered most were the Indian DalitBahujans. Not just

in the text called *Purusha Sukta* that explicitly outlines this philosophy, but throughout Hindu literature, the notion of human inequality as natural and divine was systematically established and propagated. By so doing they fixed the social inequities of their

day as if they were eternal and unchangeable. In all other religions groups of people have suffered, then in the next generation the

tables have turned and the oppressors become the oppressed.

Through this process of cyclical social change governments have

been overthrown, hegemonies challenged and laws overturned,

until through struggle a more equitable society has been built,

sometimes at great cost. The democratic construction of the spiritual realm made such changes possible in these religions. Ideas of reparation and justice as ideals for believers to strive for generated forces to reverse social oppressions and reformulate hierarchies. If the social pendulum swung too far in one direction, another revolution would come along to correct it, perhaps again inviting correction a generation later. But nowhere in the history of mankind has one

correction a generation later. But nowhere in the history of mankind has one group, the upper castes of India, been able to oppress so

many, the DalitBahujans or the ‘oppressed majority’, for so long.

The system whereby they have done so is spiritual fascism.

Other religions have striven for permanence, but with crucial differences. Islam also did not allow any change in the text of the scriptures, but at the practical level Islam did in fact allow many changes, the apparatus of ‘interpretation’ providing some latitude for adjusting approved practice to changing times. Christianity, once it has enshrined itself in a church, became inhospitable to change. However, this unchanging character was primarily religious and scriptural: society itself did and could change if social pressures in favour of change were strong enough. Priests, ulemas and people of authority

could act to reconcile social practice with religious belief as and when necessary. But in spite of lacking an organized ‘church’, Hinduism

professed to be an enemy of change itself and set out to accomplish

the illusion, if not the reality, of a changeless, pastless, historyless society where all social hierarchies were fixed for all time, regardless of the actual needs and pressures that real people might face.

Such a sweeping denial of the place of change in human life, purchased at the cost of untold misery for so many who were robbed of their chance to rise in society and realize their full potential, can only be called spiritual fascism.

The concept of spiritual fascism refers to the historical essence of the Hindu religion that is basically fascistic: it seeks to strike down all possibility of dissent from, or revision of, its glorifying of inequality, its hatred of debate and change, its antipathy to productive activity and its emphasis on outward action including physical force, symbols and ritual. Many articles in this volume examine this question in

different contexts. As I see the situation, no change or transformation from within the religious structure seems possible. This historical essence is being brought into full-scale operation with the formation of modern brahminic organizations like the Rashtriya

Swayamsevak Sangh, the Vishva Hindu Parishad, the Bajrang Dal,

and so on. Among their many aims these bodies also seek to organize Other Backward Classes (OBC), Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) youth into a force for providing muscle power for their programmes by giving them *trishuls* (tridents), *chakras* (sharpedged throwing discs), bows and arrows (weapons of the ancient Hindu heroes who killed many SCs, STs and OBCs in myths and legends)

and other lethal weapons while giving books and other intellectually usable instruments to Brahmins, Banivas and other upper caste youth. Tragically, the SC, ST and OBC youth see these acts as empowering, not realizing that unless the fundamental dichotomy is addressed they will always be in a subservient position to the upper castes. They will be first on the firing line when action is needed, but when thought, organization and planning are required, they will

be left out because of their lack of skills, with losses to themselves.

The same divide also allows English education to the children of upper castes. The children of lower castes are being forced to learn regional languages, again to fit them as the modern servants of the

upper castes. Like the ancient Hanuman, these youth are being coopted into a form of modern slavery. The upper castes seek to make them modern weapon-wielding cultural strong-arm squads who nevertheless have no control over books, reading and writing, with what little experience they have of these things restricted to the regional languages. These languages do not have the resources to expose them

to universal notions of equality, modernity, social progress and selfawareness and do not equip them to become confident rulers. Even communist Hindus allow this linguistic difference to continue, or

actively promote it. The top Hindu communist leaders educate their

own children in the English language and ask the children of the

masses to learn regional languages. The rhetoric of nationalism is

being Used to maintain this mode of hegemony and subordination,

in some cases with a narrow regional twist to it.

The aim of the brahminic forces is simple: the DalitBahujans are to be made to live and work for the cause of upper caste education,

enjoyment and wealth, but not for themselves. This modern spiritual fascism is more dangerous than the ancient and medieval versions. It operates in many nuanced forms. In the guise of a nationalist cultural element, this spiritual fascism is being shoved down the throats of DalitBahujans and indeed many have now swallowed it.

In ancient times Sudras were made to kill Sudras and Chandalas were made to kill Chandalas, thus saving the upper castes the necessity of dirtying their hands. Injected with this ideology of cultural nationalism many Dalit-Bahuajans are now working in the ranks of

Hindutva to kill their own DalitBahujan brothers and sisters who have embraced religions like Islam and Christianity. Communities that do

not realize that their self and being are as important as that of others, fall into the trap of those who construct themselves as above others.

Brahminism as an ideology keeps the SCs, STs and OBCs perennial

slaves. The first task is to address this problem.

Why Buffalo Nationalism?

The Hindu religion has constructed all its symbols—animate and inanimate—around racist and casteist unproductive cultural values.

One such inanimate-value-centred symbol is the *swastika.* This symbol is common, with minor differences, to both Hitler's and Hindu Aryanism. The swastika does not resemble any one of the thousands

of productive instruments that the Indian DalitBahujan masses have

designed and constructed, and does not represent their spiritual, social and economic aspirations. In Germany it represented the negative aspirations of negative people and in India the same symbol is now becoming the emblem of spiritual fascist nationalism. Its exhibition on cars, buses and sometimes even

spiritual fascist nationalism. Its exhibition on cars, buses and sometimes even two-wheelers gives a sense of the public display of an image of hegemony rather than of the

invocation of spirituality. Some DalitBahujans use it without understanding its implications. The swastika has never represented DalitBahujan aspirations and culture, but rather Aryan hegemonic aggressive culture and its aspirations to stand against the culture and aspirations of the DalitBahujan masses.

The second symbol that is visibly present in the public realm is the trishul or trident (a weapon of violence with three sharp spikes and a long handle). Ever since Tilak the extremist nationalist used

Hindu weapons as symbols during the early nationalist period, right

wing Hindus have used the trishul as a consciously constructed

weapon of violence against Muslims, Christians and other minority

religions. Historically this was also a weapon of violence for use

against the Sudras, Chandalas and tribals by the Hindu upper castes.

Once these castes settled on the weapon of choice, they have from

time to time only changed the constituency that needed to be targeted. For a long time the DalitBahujans were the target; now the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and the Vishva Hindu Parishad

headed by the Hindu upper castes have been distributing trishuls

as weapons of violence against Muslims and Christians. The rhetoric employed while distributing these weapons is quite open and brazen: kill the enemies. The irony of the matter is, Hinduism as a

religion and Brahmins as the priestly class have never believed in

distributing books to the people, not even as instruments to keep

them within the hegemony of Hinduism. Where other religions

like Christianity and Islam believe in distributing spiritual books, whether the

Bible or Quran or books related to them, Hindu organizations never even distributed books like the Bhagavad Gita to people whom they otherwise define (at their convenience) as Hindus. In the battle plan that the brahminic upper castes have generated, the DalitBahujans are to be used as the trishul-wielding foot soldiers. In the political realm they want the DalitBahujans to be

Hindus for purposes of vote enumeration and electoral victory but

without any right to rule brahminic Hindus.

Hinduism has never tried to incorporate any productive symbols into its spiritual life. The Hindutva forces have realized the risks to their rule posed by an emerging self-emancipating consciousness

among the DalitBahujans in the advanced era of globalized capitalism, namely, the possibility of cultural globalization opening up their minds and inducing them to put the granting of their cultural rights on the agenda. Hence the upper castes use the mantra of Hindu nationalism in invoking symbols that are and always have been inimical to the DalitBahujan way of life and hopes of change and development.

In the realm of inanimate symbolism several organic productive DalitBahujan symbols were constructed around Buddhism and some

of the Bahujan schools of thought. Hinduism has never recognized

them or granted them the space they deserve in Indian cultural life.

Setting aside the productive symbols that the masses constructed is

one of Hindutva's main agendas. The symbols that evolved around

Buddhism were inherently peace-and democracy-centred images and

express appreciation of the mass productive culture of the people.

For example, Buddhism used the bullock cart's wheel as the basis of

its symbol of the *dharmachakra* or wheel of law because Buddhism encouraged an agrarian and transport revolution. The wheel, thus,

symbolized the productive and transformative processes then at work

in Indian society. This process was intrinsic to the advancing production process at that time. Evolving a revolutionized agrarian production and a bullock-cart transportation system through the building of roads and inns was a positive aim for Ashoka, the first major Buddhist ruler. It is common knowledge that after the Kalinga war Ashoka gave up Hinduism and its violent ideological practices and took to

Buddhism. He then established the first welfare administration that

began to look into people's needs and represented the positive cultures of productive beings. The Ashoka Chakra represented the positivist attitude then changing India. It also allowed for the possibility of change, for as the wheel turns that which is high becomes low, while the low becomes high. In the Ashoka Chakra the productive masses

saw the image of their sweat and blood. The people who were involved in transporting dead carcases used the cart. They used it for transporting leather. Potters used it for transporting clay. Shepherds used it for transporting woollen clothes they produced from the wool of their flocks of sheep. Farmers used it for transporting their grain, hay, and so on. Hence the wheel was a symbol of progress and development. Hinduism never owned such symbols of production and transportation and Hindutva ideologues even today treat Ashoka with

contempt. Against Ashoka they projected Samudra Gupta or

Vikramaditya who killed thousands of DalitBahujans in war and out

of it. These kings lived by constantly oppressing and killing the

masses and hence are heroes to the upper castes.

The rural productive masses in their day-to-day struggles evolved their own symbols around their production processes. Many such

symbols became part of their spiritual life as well. In India the wheel and pot are good examples of such mass symbols. In Europe in the

phase of transition from feudalism to capitalism the rural producers used the hammer and sickle as their symbols. The communist movement later adopted

hammer and sickle as their symbols. The communist movement later adopted these very same symbols as historic working class icons. The question is whether production and spirituality are interconnected or not. Though spirituality deals with the 'other world' it does not necessarily disconnect itself from the productive process in this one. Hinduism constructed symbols that negate productivity and

focus on war and violence as the essential core of spirituality. Both the holy Hindu epics centre on wars. While early societies do tend

to be warlike and most ancient epics depict if not celebrate wars, a continuance of this mindset beyond its historical moment locks society into an endless cycle of pointless and unproductive conflict. The caste system was constructed out of these violent modes and rallied

round these symbols of violence—for all time.

Religious reformers such as Christ and Buddha elected to fight symbols of violence with other symbols of peace and love. Throughout the world the pre-Buddha and pre-Christ forms of religions were superstitious and violence-centred. An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, was their philosophy. Buddha changed that course of religion

and Jesus made non-violence and sacrifice the most ethical values

of the spiritual life.

Christianity used the cross on which Jesus sacrificed his life for the liberation of others as their revered symbol of sacrifice. Jesus too was the 'lamb of God', the meek saviour. The values of war

and violence and the values of sacrifice differ. Modern Hinduism

tried to project the Gandhian experiment of non-violence as the

Hindu ethic. They forgot that Gandhi operated within the

Bhagavad Gita and *Rama Rajya* paradigms which essentially built their philosophy around war and violence. A Christian in his/her

daily life might use violence, but his/her actions were not sanctioned by the

sacrificial ethics of Jesus, and an honest assessment by the individual could induce guilt and repentance for failing to

live up to the Christian ideal. The biblical notion of the 'kingdom

of God' is based on spiritual, social and legal equality, whereas the concept of Rama Rajya stands for opposite values. Violence is built

into the divinity of the *Ramayana.* Furthermore, the *Ramayana* is not about Rama Rajya but about Rama's struggle to win back Sita

from Ravana, and then his bowing to rumour to send her into exile.

Hindutva ideologues tend to be silent on exactly what aspect of

Rama's rule constitutes the ideal, and consequently Rama Rajya is

constructed as whatever rule the upper castes see fit.

The Muslims used the crescent moon as a symbol of a positive direction, with a wish that one day humanity will see and achieve

the full moon. The appearance of the crescent moon signals the end

of the month of fasting and penance. This is hardly a symbol of violence, and thus the use of the crescent moon by some Islamic groups as a means to induce terror lacks conviction. Unlike Jesus and Buddha, Prophet Mohammed was a pragmatist. He lived in a time and society that was extremely violent, and his early followers, like those of Christ, suffered persecution. His conquering of other peoples was primarily in order to bring the word of God to them, not to rule or

subjugate them. Even so on several occasions the early Muslims were

in danger of being completely wiped out at the hands of enemy forces.

Islam neither projected violence nor self-sacrifice as the core value of the spiritual life. Both in relation to war and self-sacrifice it made itself contextual. Neither in its discourse nor practice has Hinduism made violence contextual; instead it essentializes it. The swastika, the Hindu brahminic symbol with the four prongs that may be called

a ‘fourshul’ (a four-pronged trident), carries an unspoken message of violence, suggesting a throwing weapon like the sharpedged discus.

The people who were killed and maimed by all the Hindu weapons

were DalitBahujans. Now the attempt is to use them against Muslims, Christians and Buddhists. A so-called non-violent Brahmin priest in the name of non-violence worships the killers as Gods and their

weapons of war as symbols of spirituality. This is a negative human

value. Violence-centred spirituality has set the Indian system backward. Those who have benefited from this spirituality constantly worship these destructive symbols and keep telling those who lost

everything because of them that the symbols are unalterable and

omnipresent.

Items like turmeric and neem leaves, the basis of folk medicines, and the plough, spade, pot and wheel could never become spiritually respectable items within the Hindu tradition, because their very utility marked them as mundane and unspiritual. The prevalent

brahminic bias against usefulness of any sort privileged the ‘useless’

mystic and warlike symbols of Brahminism over the useful, peaceable and easily recognizable DalitBahujan ones.

In the realm of animate symbols Hindu Brahminism has projected the cow as a divine animal since Vedic times, although in Vedic religion the cow’s sanctity was due to its significance as a sacrificial offering and as the food of the sacrificers. Today they

project the cow as a nationalist animal. A particular breed of white cow was the most prized Aryan food animal, which came to India

along with the invading Aryan tribes in the ancient period. The

Aryan Brahmins used to kill thousands of cows and bulls in the

name of sacrifice, as is recorded at length in the Hindu scriptures.

At the level of use-value all sacrificed animals were used for food, just as many DalitBahujans do now with regard to goats, sheep and

chickens. It appears that the Aryans brought not only their own

breed of cow but also a breed of horse as well. As I said earlier, the cow was for food while the horse was for war. The Aryans never

allowed the horse to become a productive animal. We see the horse

in Hindu mythology only as an animal of war harnessed to the

rat ha (chariot). As a result even now the horse is rarely used to transport materials: at best it is used to carry humans. In Europe

and America the horse was/is an agrarian productive animal.

The Hindu tradition did not own any animal that had indigenous roots. For example, by the time the Aryans came the buffalo was well established as a domestic and milch animal in India, domesticated

by the indigenous Dravidian cultures. Of all wild animals the buffalo is and was very powerful and difficult to tame. It appears that only the DalitBahujans—perhaps only the social group that still tends and herds animals, the present Yadavs—domesticated them. Taming

and nurturing animals need a great deal of study and observation of

animal psychology, a discipline which the Indian Brahmins never took up. They were never animal-friendly people. How they came to a

conclusion that the cow was a great spiritual animal we do not know.

They certainly did not extend this privilege to any other beast, and indeed other animals feature only rarely in the scriptures.

Recently the BJP has proposed an Anti-Cow Slaughter Bill, but in it they have not mentioned buffalo protection even though buffaloes

produce most of the milk in India. The Hindutva forces argue that

cow protection is a faith-and sentiment-based issue like the question of Rama's birth at Ayodhya. Why did the cow but not the buffalo become a Hindu spiritual animal? The reason is simple: the buffalo

is a black animal. Just as the Dravidians, a black people, were never granted any spiritual status, the buffalo as a black animal was allowed none. Brahminic Hindu literature projected Brahmins as *bhudevatas* (Gods on earth) and the cow as Gomata (the mother animal) as it was

white as well as their staple food. For generation after generation

Hindu scriptures venerated Brahmins among human beings and cows

among animals.

Among the Indian social groups the Sudra-Chandalas were the most productive. Among female cattle, buffaloes have the highest

use-value even now. Because of its capacity to give milk the buffalo is the most loved and cared for animal in almost every poor family

in India, yet the Hindutva forces do not recognize its worth. Hence

it has been granted no right to be recognized as a national animal.

There is no movement to grant it constitutional protection as has been provided for the cow.

The Western world failed to domesticate buffaloes. American settlers killed thousands in their bid to wipe out the indigenous peoples of the continent, and because they feared and hated the black buffalo just as they feared, hated and despised the black man. They never attempted to tame the beast because it seemed to them inherently

evil because of its colour and its religious and economic significance for the indigenous Americans. The Indian DalitBahujans not only

domesticated it, but transformed it into a docile milk-producing and draft beast. Seventy-five percent of Indian milk comes from the

country's buffalo population. It is odd that Hindu literature has talked elaborately about cow's milk, its contribution to Indian food culture and heritage, and its great sanctity, without once mentioning or recognizing the similar contribution of buffaloes, in spite of the fact that most Indian children would not survive without its milk. The buffalo's unholy milk has never been treated as a product to be written about.

Whether this animal has given milk to the Indian people, whether

its energy has been used for agrarian production from ancient times

or not is something on which the scriptures are entirely silent, yet even today the buffaloes' contribution to the Indian economy in terms of milk, meat, draft power, fuel and fertiliser exceeds that of the cow many times over. Yet why does Hindu literature, Hindu tradition,

Hindu culture render the buffalo so greatly invisible? Is it not that it is a black animal indigenous to this land and thus repugnant to the

foreign invaders, and has been rewarded for its patient service by

being regarded as the symbol of all evil?

Why did black and white become so distinctly opposite in human perception in general and the brahminic perception in particular?

There have been racist tendencies among all light-coloured human

beings throughout history. The Blacks of America and the Blacks of

Africa had to wage a major battle against racism among colonial

Europeans and American White settlers. Caste seems to have been

constructed out of this same racist mindset. The earliest theoretical formulation for it seems to have been accomplished in India as the

first invasive war was fought between Dravidians—the Black people

of India—and the light brown Aryans who came from outside. The

first evidence of *varna* (colour) division is to be found in the *Purusha Sukta* of the Rig Veda itself.

What are the implications of the varna mode of Indian racism?

Today all productive Indians suffer from caste discrimination that has deep racist dimensions. Where race intersects with gender, further

scope for exploitation and oppression occurs. If anyone doubts that

India is a country obsessed with race, they should read the matrimonial columns of any newspaper, and note all the grooms asking for fair and beautiful brides. Indeed the two terms have become almost

synonymous, such that a dark bride is expected to pay more dowry

to compensate her groom's family for her 'disability'. Even the Nazis with their eugenics failed to achieve such absolute racial control.

This racist mind has been extended even to the animal world.

All through the phase of Hindu nationalism the cow—an animal that

has white race characteristics—was projected as a highly divine creature. Gandhian nationalism projected it as a great nationalist animal as well, and pushed cow protection as a constitutional objective. Cow protection was made one of the objectives of the Indian Constitution in the Directive Principles of State Policy. When questions have been raised about the rationality of this measure every apologist states over and over again that the cow is protected on the grounds that it gives us milk. The absurdity of this reasoning is evident from the

fact that these considerate reformers seem blind to the fact that the buffalo does that and more. Once again, we return to questions of

colour and race.

The people who fought the philosophical moorings of such notions of racism in the earliest period of the world were the Indian Dravidians. The African Blacks came in contact with White people

only in the beginning of modern colonialism. Classical White racism, combined with modern weaponry, established a very bloody version of racism in Africa. However, the Africans could subvert that racist theory and establish a notional hegemony of ^black is beautiful' with the help of the preachings of Jesus whose life demonstrated the demolishing of distinctions of colour in the realm of spiritual

thought. Racism constructed a strong theory of racial superiority and inferiority based on a theory of colours that related certain colours to the realm of the divine and certain others to the devil. They declared and propagated the idea that white represents peace and divinity and black represents misfortune and devilishness.

Colours are not only present in the larger universe but also in the human body. Though the theory of white being superior/good and

black inferior/bad seems to have been constructed in relation to a

larger universe, it was extended to the human identity. Thus the many hues of human skin, hair, teeth, tongue and so on were reduced to

two essential and mutually exclusive categories. Since the early

definers were Whites, their own colour was constructed as superior

and those who were Black, or rather Non-White, were defined as inferior in all respects. The Indian Dravidians seem to have opposed this mode of colour classification of people into inferior and superior and the whitish Aryans seem to have used violence to subdue the

Dravidian rebellions. Periyar E. V. Ramasamy was the first modern

Dravidian to wage a major battle against this Aryan white racism. My indebtedness in evolving the concept of buffalo nationalism goes to

him, just as I am indebted to Ambedkar for my understanding of the

caste question and in publicizing my understanding I am indebted

to the Ambekarite and Mandal movements

to the Ambedkarite and Mandal movements.

The Metaphor of Buffalo Nationalism

'Cow' nationalism has come to be known as Hindu, or in other words brahminic nationalism. Brahminic social forces, irrespective of their political and ideological location, carry a historical feeling of social superiority with them. When Gandhi was constructing his own theory of cow nationalism he had in mind the vast Brahmin presence in the

Indian National Congress. The concept of the sacredness of the cow

and the linking of that sacredness to the political agenda of nationalism is a diabolical scheme that Indian Brahmin intellectuals worked out. Hindu cow nationalism during the period of anti-colonial

struggle was projected as anti-British but in an actual historical sense it had an anti-Dalit-Bahujan connotation. Once the two-nation theory began to be expressed by Muslim leaders it was successfully positioned as anti-Muslim as well.

This nationalist metaphor was aimed at constructing the vegetarianism of Brahmins and Baniyas as the superior food culture and more particularly to build an anti-beef position as beef was considered part of the Muslim food culture. But almost all national leaders including Gandhi know that meat and beef are very deeply integrated into the

food cultures of DalitBahujans in India. Since nationalism is culturerelated, the inner historical dimensions of brahminic hegemony were not grasped by the Sudras, SCs and STs at that time. Even Ambedkar

was misled on the question of Aryan racism and Dalit food culture.

He rejected the view of caste as Aryan racism and asked his people

to give up beef eating. When Gandhi took up the campaign of cow

protection and vegetarianism it was understood as a project to spiritualize nationalism, but not many grasped the political agenda behind it. The full scope of it is coming out only now.

Cow nationalism is a dangerous anti-Dravidian and anti-DalitBahujan ideology. It de-legitimized Dravidian black beauty and plurality of food culture. Nicholas Dirks in his masterpiece on caste, *Castes of Mind: Colonisation and the Ma king of Modern India* (Princeton, 2001), has established how Brahmin pandits misdirected the whole

colonial understanding of caste. Many Europeans even now are made

to believe that cow nationalism is culturally superior. Many of them fall into the trap of brahminic vegetarianism as well. Colonialism in India played a very casteist role preventing even Christian missionaries from attacking caste. The system of spirituality that revered the cow, extolled the greatness of vegetarian food, and performed pujas

round the clock was seen as socio-spiritually superior. Colonial rulers, scholars and missionaries were coopted into a kind of secondhand Brahminism. That is the reason why they forced so little Westernization and so little modernization on India, unlike the situation in Africa where there was no powerful social group comparable to the Brahmins to stand in their way. There, white racism operated

on Black tribal cultures directly rather than through the mediation of a pre-existing institutionalized racism such as the caste system. While many Black Africans today bemoan the destruction of Black cultures

and their replacement wholesale by Western modernism, the fact remains that unlike India's DalitBahujans who are still fighting historical oppression within the nation, Black Africans have access to the benefits (and the disadvantages) of modernism because of this

unmediated action of colonialism on their communities. Within a period of a hundred and fifty years the Blacks became the masters of their own destiny. In the beginning the Europeans went with the

Bible and they gave it to the African tribals and took away their land.

Though the land went out of their hands for some time, a socio-spiritually liberating God came to them instead. They saw Jesus in their own colour and established an intimate relationship with the Jesus

who had fought for the liberation of Samaritans and gentiles. With

the help of the very same Bible that the European Whites had given

them, they took Jesus away from the Europeans and made him their

own.

In India the transformative power of Jesus' creed was filtered through the lens of caste. Jesus' productive origins as a carpenter's son were glossed over and he was remade in the image of the masterly colonials or the leisurely Brahmins themselves. If the Indian Christians proclaimed that Jesus was a shepherd they did not mean

it literally: they never Dalitized him. The Syrian Christians of

Kerala established intimate relations with Hindu Brahminism and

started working as the enemies of both Jesus and DalitBahujans.

They took away the shepherd from the sheep and made Jesus racist and casteist. The Indian Christian educational institutions taught English to Indian Brahmins and Banias for money. Catholic nuns

and monks invested their time and energy in creating a monstrous

class of racist and casteist brahminic forces that eventually worked against them. If the Bible in Africa played a socially transformative role, the Bible in India became another Bhagavad Gita. The Bible

in Africa also acted as a vehicle of the English (or other European) language, a tool which remained in African hands after the return

of their homelands to their people. A country like South Africa

became a more modern nation than India. But the Brahmins of

India did not allow the Bible and its message to be exchanged for

land. Africa is using the colonial linguistic heritage for its own benefit, but the Brahmins, Baniyas and Neo-Kshatrivas quite conveniently took English from the British and after the British went away took control of the land and industry as well.

Not a single European writer who has undertaken research on caste has been able to understand the Brahmin mind. That mind has never

been concerned with the nation and its people, but rather with material acquisition and ritual purity: it was basically concerned with its own belly, with what should go in and what might pollute it. That

belly, apparently, should get the Big Vegetarian Meal without doing

any physical work. Even Gandhi, in spite of all his efforts to reform Hinduism from within, could not escape this obsession with the belly.

His vegetarian nationalism, as Sarojini Naidu herself remarked, became a costly affair for the Congress and the nation too. The metaphor of buffalo nationalism is an antithesis to this attitude. The buffalo here represents the whole Dravidian, now DalitBahujan, culture. It

represents the notion that black is beautiful. It represents human

dignity and the dignity of labour. It represents the equality of colour and the end of racism, an egalitarian and productive nationalism. It allows enormous scope for expanding the nationalist horizons of

minority religions. It generates an entirely indigenous discourse of education and knowledge, and has the potential to generate a new

discourse on Indian nationalism. Once black is accepted as a beautiful colour and the buffalo is accepted as a nationalist animal the exclusivist and iniquitous sanctity of the Vedas dies. The *Vinaya Pitaka*, Bible, Quran, Guru Granth Sahib, and so on, become nationalist books.

The Dravidian race, as far back as the Indus Valley civilization, domesticated the beautiful black buffalo and transformed this wild

forest-dweller into a lovable, placid milch and draft animal: it features on numerous seals recovered from the archaeological sites of that civilization. Even assuming that the historical evidence for that period is non-verifiable, in the modern period buffalo is far more

common as a household milk-producing animal than the cow. For

common as a household milk-producing animal than the cow. For

millions of poor DalitBahujan households of India the homely buffalo is the most prized beast. Its blackness has never been a hindrance to their love of it. The fact that it produces more and richer milk per head than the Indian cow was/is reason enough to love it. The cow

nationalists have never realized that the colour of buffalo milk and that of the cow is the same. Yet in the discourse of animal protection the buffalo never figures.

Aryanism seems to have constructed an early philosophy of ‘black is bad’ and ‘white is good’. The present discourse intends to reverse this philosophy along with its effects. The present DalitBahujan

struggle is to undo that structural process of underdevelopment. For that we need to change the philosophy of caste, colour, language,

land, animals, birds, food and so on. We must deploy symbols that

have opposite and corrective meanings, ideology and philosophy to

that of Hindu Brahminism. That is where the survival of this nation

lies.

Quite ironically the cow cannot be an exclusive Indian or Asian animal as it is used in all countries as a source of both milk and meat.

The Euro-American continents survive on the economy of the cow,

but they do not have a buffalo economy. If Indian nationalism has to be built on a symbol from our animal heritage it has to be built on

the buffalo, which is exclusively Indian. We know that the whole

North Indian nationalist debate was centred on Aryanism during the

early and later nationalist periods. Only after the Tamil Dravida nationalist discourse began to expand was the discourse around Aryan nationalism superseded. The process of critiquing the spiritual fascism of Hindutva must continue, and for this the buffalo is a potent symbol, exposing at once the

continue, and for this the buffalo is a potent symbol, exposing at once the unproductive bias of Hindutva thought

and overturning the binaries of black/white, sacred/profane that have been dinned into us by so many commentators. The buffalo is everything the cow is and more, particularly its colour and its non-Aryan origin and cultural significance. And these two factors alone have been enough to condemn it as devilish and allow its defeat and killing to be celebrated annually by Hindu ideologues. The buffalo is portrayed in Hindu iconography as the bearer of the God of Death, and as the

demon killed by the Goddess Durga at the behest of Rama. It is

unnecessary to point out the coercive message that these images send out to the people who love, rely on, care for, cultivate with, profit from, and prize the buffalo, and who have accomplished the feat of

domesticating this unique animal. If there is one symbol that exalts the culture of the DalitBahujans and simultaneously brings the sophistry of Hindutva crashing down like a house of cards, it is the buffalo. Once we recognize this, we must work to construct a new, inclusive and just nationalism around the buffalo and all it stands for.

PART 1
On Communal Violence

1

Ayodhya: What Stake Do OBCs Have?

The muscle power for the Ayodhya temple campaign is mobilized mainly from among the Other Backward Classes (OBCs), but the Sangh Parivar has no programme to change their location in brahminic civil society. In terms of religious life, the Scheduled Castes are looking towards Buddhism and Christianity, but the OBCs are a directionless social force available to be used by the Hindutva forces as muscle power, as they did at the time of demolishing the Babri Masjid. We now see them being mobilized to build the contentious Ram temple and more particularly at the time of riots such as the one created in Gujarat. What stake do the OBCs have to make them put their lives, fortunes and energies into an issue such as Ayodhya?

In the period after the destruction of the Babri Masjid, liberal writers pointed out that the OBCs were in the lead of the rioting and property-destruction squads formed by the Hindutva forces. The jail records show that hardly any upper caste youths have gone to jail in riot cases and that most undertrials were/are OBCs and Muslims. Muslims and Christians have come to see the OBCs as a mercenary social force. The OBCs, unable to get English education at the top missionary schools, have no positive opinion of the Christian community. As an OBC, I am terribly disturbed by this situation.

The upper caste forces under the overall supervision of the Sangh Parivar leadership that essentially comes from the *dwija* castes, conducts the Ayodhya temple agitation. The Sant Sabha, the Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas (RJN) and by and large all Parivar organizations are headed by the upper castes. The OBCs are not eligible to be part of the leadership of the Sant Sabha or the RJN. The top leadership of the VHP—Ashok Singhal, Giriraj Kishore and Praveen Togadia—comes from the dwija and Sudra upper caste social forces. The OBCs now have only the right to enter temples. They have neither the right to dwijahood nor to head any Hindu organization. The classical social position of Sudras—the

largest number being OBCs—has not changed.

If we look at the ownership of top industrial concerns and the vast service sector, all are in the hands of the dwija castes in general, while the control of the urban economy is in the hands of Sangh Parivar forces in particular. The presence of Muslims and Christians in the industrial economy is marginal. What is the presence of OBCs in industrial property ownership and employment, in what can be called the Hindu economy? It can be safely said, marginal. If they too are Hindus as the dwijas are, why do they not get a share in the higher ranks of industry and its benefits? Why does caste-based ownership exist? The OBCs have been denied any share in either the manufacturing or service sectors that operate as Hindu economic structures. Giriraj Kishore, just before the Durban conference, August 2001, is on record as saying that Hindu society cannot afford to do away with the caste system. According to him, the notion of equal rights to all castes will violate the basic rights of upper castes. Furthermore, all the upper caste leaders of the Sangh Parivar—the VHP more openly than others—oppose the principle of reservation for OBCs.

What is the presence of OBCs even as employees in industry, shops and software companies owned by the Sangh Parivar industrialists and businessmen? The upper castes opposed the entry of OBCs both in government and the private sector employment during the Mandal agitation. In fact, the Ram temple issue was forced on the nation to divert attention from the Mandal movement. Even now, who is opposing the notion of reservation in the private sector? It is the Sangh Parivar because its adherents control a lot of private industry. Why then are the OBCs participating in the Ayodhya issue where more blood is likely to flow? In no other struggle has so much blood been spilt in the country since Independence—and most of the blood is that of OBCs and Muslims. The BJP came to power based on the blood spilt at the time of the destruction of the Babri Masjid. But who were the top cabinet ministers in the first Vajpayee government? No OBC could become a minister of high importance. In spite of this experience, the OBCs are marching into Ayodhya. Why?

The OBC population has the highest number of unemployed who provide the muscle power for small benefits offered. By and large, OBC" youth have been left out of modern English education and their presence in the diaspora is minimal. Their numbers are negligible in the sunrise industries and in the IT sector as well. The Hindutva organizations that command dollar money have not started good educational institutions for the OBCs. The few top English medium schools their sympathizers run do not admit OBC children. For purposes such as

schools their sympathizers run do not admit OBC children. For purposes such as the Ram Janmabhumi movement, the OBCs are treated as Hindus; but when it comes to the question of modernizing them, they are the 'others'.

By keeping OBC youth uneducated and unemployed, a lumpen reserve army remains readily available for use by the Hindutva forces. But no OBC who participates in the temple campaign can ever hope to become a priest in the Ram temple when the Hindutva forces build it at Ayodhya, nor can he hope to command any social respect. The sants command so much power today that the PMO is at their beck and call. The OBCs do not have that kind of clout.

Of late, OBC children are being admitted into Saraswati Shishu Mandirs mostly to train them as Hindu militants. The children of top Sangh Parivar leaders get good English education to become future NRIs. They become 'patriots from abroad' and finance temple construction, whereas the OBC youth have to perform the physical rioting and in the process, their small economies get ruined.

In the increasing process of privatization, those few OBCs who are educated do not get jobs in Hindu industry or in Hindu temples. The casual employment that used to be available for OBCs is shrinking as upper caste Hindu contractors now perform these tasks with their cranes, tractors, bulldozers, and so on. What is left for the OBC youth is being hired to carry pillars for temples and participating in riots for a small payment. If they go to jail, which serves somewhat better food than their homes, life goes on. Thus, a commitment to Hindutva is, for them, a forced commitment of the belly.

The Hindutva economy has deliberately trapped them in this dragnet. One can see some OBC youth with huge tilaks on their foreheads becoming street toughs or small leaders in the *mohallas.* The VHP leaders have no problem with this kind of growth among OBC youth. These young men collect small amounts of money for festivals and some of them roam about continuously on motorcycles. If they do not aspire to air travel, imported cars and good English education, as the top Hindutva leaders do for their children, their nationalism and *dharma* are considered intact.

The top dwija castes are getting everything without suffering and that is what dharmic Hinduism is. Let the OBCs think: should their children live like this forever?

The Hindu, 18 March 2002

2

Consequences of the Call for Epic War

Ever since the RSS chief K. S. Sudarshan gave a call for ‘epic war’, a lot of blood has flowed down the rivers of India. Institutions were bombed and the devout feared to go to their places of worship due to threats of blasts. The Kashmiri terrorists killed several people. Despite all this there has not been much debate over such a call and its consequences.

Assuming that foreign forces are behind these incidents, we must realize that this happens only in a communally charged situation where conditions for religious war have been created by a section of the ruling class itself. Recent trends indicate that a subtle mode of theocratic law has begun to operate in the country. Is there not clear evidence of theocratic rule when, charged with catching hold of a particular brand of communal rioters rampaging on the streets, Hindutva rulers find it impossible to locate the culprits? And in instances when such a culprit is located, like the Shiv Sena chief Bal Thackeray, all the institutional structures shudder at the thought of punishing them. The situation makes the operation of Pakistan-instigated jihad-centred terrorism easier, and stimulates the Deendar Anjuman kind of forces to operate as they did in the South.

Indian civil society and state are under siege from communal politics. Widespread fear has already gripped the civilian masses. The ruling classes-castes themselves have created a ‘war terrain’ and in the process, built conditions for others to take the ‘position of war’ either on their own or with the support of external agencies even within the mainland, leave alone the borders.

Thus the call for epic war by the RSS chief has triggered conditions that allow all kinds of terrorism, but only some will be named while others remain nameless. If such a call had come from an organization not part of the Parivar of the ruling Hindutva party, perhaps things would have been different. The positioning of the religious forces in such a war of nerves is in tandem with their ideological framework. If the RSS and other Parivar forces go around policing in khaki knickers, the Islamic fundamentalists reply with bombs and daggers. The Christian organizations are still at a stage of positioning themselves with a call for mass prayers and asking for the forgiveness of the Lord. But this in itself shows their preparedness.

Ever since the Hindutva forces came to power, the making of bombs and breaking of relations laboriously built across the borders (good examples are our present ties with Pakistan and Sri Lanka) seem to have been legitimized. The call for jihad on the Kashmir border and the attempts to mobilize Hindutva forces inside the Indian mainland are consequences of communal parties coming to power with agendas of destroying one kind of religious structure and constructing another. Unfortunately the project of nation-building is being identified with the construction of religious vote banks, which for historical reasons of caste hierarchy is going to be impossible. As this impossibility appears to be imminent, the frustration of religious organizers like Sudarshan is expressed only by constructing an enemy image of somebody against whom one kind of war or the other needs to be declared.

Religion is a faith internalized and cemented within its believers that cannot be shaken so easily. Once that faith is passed on from generation to generation, no outside agency can change that consciousness by force. The survival of Judaism among Jews who were spread over the Western world amidst a powerful anti-Semitic campaign by Christianity proves this point beyond doubt. The problem of India is not that external forces are interfering in the affairs of the comfortably existing internal masses. The problem is that internal immobility within the spiritual and socio-political spaces constantly leaves open avenues for others to operate with what appears to be historical necessity. The reasons for this internal immobility can be easily located both in Hindu texts and in the practices based on such scriptures built into civil society over a period of centuries.

For example, in the Bhagavad Gita, which is being projected as the lifeblood of Hinduism, Krishna declares, ‘I have formulated a fourfold division of work for men in society.’ He further elaborates that Brahmins must stand for serenity, self-control, austerity, purity, forbearance, righteousness, faith, knowledge and realization. The Kshatriyas must stand for heroism, boldness, firmness, bravery, steadfastness on the battlefield, generosity and lordliness. The Vaishyas must do the duty of agriculture, cattle rearing and trade. Work in the nature of service (to the above three castes) is the duty of ‘others’— that is, the modern Dalit-Bahujans.

The moment the BJP came to power, Prime Minister A. B. Vajpayee should have called for a debate on this formulation set forth in the Bhagavad Gita and the RSS and the VHP should have mobilized public opinion to remove this section from the spiritual book. This is because the social realization of this

formulation has created a socio-spiritually moribund society. The Sudras, Chandalas and Adivasis whom the Gita characterizes as 'others' and who are supposed to serve the three upper immobile castes—Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas—have no way to liberate themselves. If the educated Dalit-Bahujans read the Gita with this section still in it, they find nothing to liberate them from spiritual slavery as they are condemned to serve perpetually the three upper castes by the God whose caste position can also be located very easily. Krishna, who made this statement, was born in a Kshatriya family, brought up in a Yadav family and was very much conditioned by the theory of *varnadharma.* The source of spiritual disunity, however, lies in the religious book itself. Some diabolical intellectuals may argue that the social location of these castes is based on *guna-karma* (virtue and the consequences of deeds) but not in its moribund caste-based institutional character. Those who argue thus do not know the existential reality. The priesthood and the prime offices remain easily accessible to Brahmins and other upper castes, but not to 'others'. This cannot just be wished away as *maya* (illusion). The formulation of the caste theory in the Rig Veda in the form of the *Purusha Sukta*, the reiteration of it in the Gita as a divine dispensation, and Kautilya and Manu constructing the same theory as a necessary condition for the building up of civil society and state, must be seen from the point of view of the Dalit Bahujans. Bangaru Laxman becoming President of the Hindutva party is not the same as a Dalit becoming Shankaracharya.

That the present civil society and state continue to operate within the broad parameters of caste theory even after fifty years of constitutional governance must be taken very seriously. If we do so, we must realize that it is not the Constitution but the Gita that needs to be reviewed. A movement should be built, at least, to remove that section of the Gita that justifies the caste (varna) system. How can a religious book construct a vast majority of people as social slaves? All faiths in the world have progressed from religions of essentialism to religions of existentialism. Hinduism remains neither here nor there. A religion that pretends to be essentialist, but is existentialist in its day-to-day life will enter into a serious contradiction with capitalist market-based social relations.

At a time when the Brahmin priest walked semi-naked and barefooted to the temple, when the markers of religion were inscribed indelibly upon people's bodies and way of life, the essentialist appearance of religion did not allow Dalit-Bahujans to hope to attain that position. But when the priest goes to the temple either on a scooter or in a car, Hinduism's transcended character from essentialism to existentialism becomes very clear and all will aspire to attain that

essentialism to existentialism becomes very clear and all will aspire to attain that existential position. The spiritual book also must allow such possibilities of transcendence for all people. As of now, the Gita does not allow it; hence, the social system remained hierarchical and moribund.

This situation forces the Dalit-Bahujans to look for an egalitarian religion just as the existential need of a Brahmin boy born in a pious family forces him even to go to brazenly beef-eating capitalist America to look for a job. The theoretical argument that burger-beef is spiritually acceptable but not cooked beef does not hold spiritual conviction. What the situation simply demands is an honest avowal of spiritual transcendence from essentialism to existentialism.

Hindutva forces should know that the book of faith of many religions has undergone changes. For example, the Old Testament was transformed into the New Testament by reformulating the essence of the Bible to make it suitable for the new social existence. The whole spiritual consciousness of people all over the world, including India, has undergone changes in history from essentialism to existentialism. By introducing universal education, the colonial rulers initiated that process of transformation and the long years of Congress rule in their own way advanced that process.

^he Sangh Parivar, by politicizing the Hindu religion, opened up these questions for a more serious scrutiny. It must resolve the contradiction between Hindutva nationalism and moribund Hindu spiritualism. Any creative understanding of the ruling class calls for a declaration of war against social evils and the resolution of basic contradictions that exist in the larger civil society. Without understanding these contradictions, or with deliberate attempts to foist the problem of national contradictions on international agencies, declaring epic war, as Sudarshan has, heightens to an alarming level the danger of India becoming an international war terrain.

Deccan Chronicle, 13 August 2000

3

Dalit, OBC and Muslim Relations

The participation of Dalits, Adivasis and OBCs in the Gujarat carnage has raised several questions with regard to the unity of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled

Tribes, OBCs and Muslims. The Hindutva forces have succeeded in making such a unity very difficult to achieve. The Muslims, unlike the Christians, do not know how to understand caste questions and handle riot situations. The persisting unfriendly relations between Muslims, Dalits and OBCs, mainly in urban areas, are worrying.

When Hindutva forces attacked Christians in several places after the BJP came to power, Dalit and Adivasi participation in those attacks was almost nil. The Dalits and Adivasis have close relations with the Christians but not with the Muslims. The OBCs have ambiguous relations with the Christians but they too have inimical ties with the Muslims. The causes for this situation need to be probed by Muslim intellectuals, otherwise Hindutva forces will continue to use the muscle power of the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes and the OBCs against the Muslims. Since almost every riot ends up in more killings of Muslims, Dalits and OBCs alike, inimical relations increase. The holding of an image of an enemy before oppressed communities is a desired tool of the Hindutva forces. This diverts attention from the basic economic, social and political issues haunting the oppressed.

Following the attacks against the community in Gujarat and elsewhere by the Sangh Parivar, India's Christian intelligentsia launched a global campaign against the fascist nature of the Parivar, damaging its credibility in the West. The VHP's attempts to get the United Nations to accord it NGO status were also thwarted. All global NGOs and government bodies received full information of the attacks and even the US Congress and the European Union Parliament took note. By contrast, the Muslim intelligentsia failed to establish a rapport with the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and the OBCs at the ground level. Though there are a number of Muslim intellectuals who can document the atrocities against the community and place such facts before the UN and other human rights bodies, they never did so. They remain inward looking and have adopted the tactics of mass defence and the politics of retaliation. This is unfortunate because the UN as a global body gives more credibility to the voices of the victims. Instead of allowing the Muslim community to indulge in retaliatory politics, UN involvement may reduce the scale of violence in India. The responsibility for not taking the Gujarat carnage to the UN lies entirely with the English-speaking Muslim intelligentsia of India. They must also be held responsible for an indifference to the issues of caste and untouchability. Historically, before the British came, the Muslim rulers and scholars did not bother to understand the caste question. A visiting scholar like Alberuni threw a cursory glance at the question but no Indian scholar or ruling power wrote at

cursory glance at the question but no Indian scholar of ruling power wrote at length on these issues. Quite surprisingly, they took no social or educational work to the Dalit-Bahujans. Because of the influence of brahminic ideology, the Muslim scholars thought that the caste system and untouchability were spiritual and that they should not interfere.

Before the Bhakti movement, a few Sufi propagators mingled with the Sudras/Chandalas of that period. But in the modern era, particularly in the post-Independence period, no Muslim intellectual worth his name has worked among the Dalits, Adivasis and OBCs. No Muslim intellectual stood by Ambedkar when he started the liberative struggle of the Dalits. Following the Mandal movement no Muslim scholar wrote on formulating an Islamic understanding of caste and untouchability. How are bridges built between communities? They are built only when one oppressed community gets the support of another and each relates to the other on a day-to-day basis. For that, a theoretical formulation is very essential.

Muslim scholarship has mainly operated within the ruling class feudal ideology. Except for a few scholars such as Irfan Habib, who came under the influence of Marxism and studied Indian society from a class point of view, no Muslim scholar has done a detailed study on the caste question. Given Islam's literary and educational culture, Muslims should have been the first to fight against caste and untouchabilitv. They should have been the first to write about the inhuman living conditions of the Dalits. However, they remained totally silent. Though the Sufi saints moved into the Dalit and the OBC communities for their spiritual campaigns, they too did not build a literary anti-caste, anti-untouchability genre.

Though the British rulers were exploiters they took a keen interest in understanding the caste system. William Carey's 'An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathen' made a serious analysis of caste and untouchability in the late eighteenth century. Many issues that later became the concerns of Raja Rammohan Roy were raised in his report. During the Mandal debate, many Hindu scholars went to the extent of saying that the British invented caste.

The Muslim intellectuals know that in the Hindu system, the Dalits and the OBCs were forcefully stopped from getting an education. The Christian missionaries introduced education to them irrespective of whether they embraced Christianity or not. Jyotirao Phule and Ambedkar have acknowledged

the sen/ice of missionaries in their writings. However, similar constructive work never came from Muslim intellectuals. The educational and health services the missionary activities rendered to the poor masses made their activity a socially integrative one. Even during the attacks on Christians in Gujarat and other places, the missionaries were able to defend their activities in India at all world forums. But Muslim intellectuals did not take up the social causes of the Adivasis, Dalits and OBCs and hence there are no deep sympathies for them.

In the case of Islam there is not only no investigative tradition, there is also no social service tradition with a sense of social interaction with people outside the fold of Islam. Muslim intellectuals must learn from Christian missionaries and work among Dalits, Adivasis and OBCs so that a relationship of trust is established. All the oppressed must learn to work for each other's liberation and build social bonds among them. That is the best way to prevent another Gujarat.

The Hindu, 29 May 2002

4

The Rise of Modi

Narendra Modi's victory with a two-thirds majority in Gujarat has signalled the emergence of a strong, independent OBC leader in the BJP. Earlier, two independent OBC leaders—Laloo Prasad Yadav and Mulayam Singh Yadav—had emerged from the fold of socialist politics in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. But that was in the context of the Yadavs emerging as landed gentry with some socioeconomic capital.

The others who became Chief Ministers in the Congress and the BJP were not independent leaders. In the BJP, Kalyan Singh tried to emerge as an independent leader but the Parivar structures did not allow him to do so. For a long time no independent OBC leader has been allowed to emerge from within the Parivar. Only Atal Behari Vajpayee and L. K. Advani were allowed that autonomous space as they had social and economic clout with them.

Modi, member of a backward caste that has little socioeconomic clout in Gujarat, used the Parivar policy of attacking the deliberately constructed enemy —Muslims—with a more organized network than that of the Parivar's Brahmin leaders. He has become a bigger hero than Advani by mobilizing muscle power

better than Advani did in 1992. He seems to have realized that only the weapon of violence— not sacrifice—can make an individual a hero and that the social value of dharma is assigned to the victorious, not the sufferer.

Ever since the Hindutva network began to organize caste-ridden Indian society into a religious-nationalist social force, one of its main problems has been how to bring the Sudras/OBCs into its fold without giving them equal rights in the spiritual realm. To achieve this, Hindutva ideologues constructed an imaginary nationalist goal and asked the otherwise uneducated OBCs to participate in nation-building without granting them a share in the national wealth. This was necessary because the caste system was undercutting the social base of the Hindu religion as the Dalits and even some OBCs were embracing other religions. For political and social consolidation of brahminical ideology such a task was deemed necessary. The Mandal agenda of the OBCs, initiated by forces outside the Hindutva network, was seen as a plan to undercut Hindu nationalism and the consolidation of forces towards majoritarianism.

The Sangh Parivar successfully organized a large section of OBCs (not as many Dalits) because neither the Congress, which had been in power for several decades, nor the communists, who were talking about socialism, had granted any visible socio-political place in their party structures to the OBCs. In the general environment of anglicized Brahminism that dominates all political formations, a majority of the OBCs were attracted to the Parivar network which spoke the native idiom and promised a dreamland Hindu Rashtra if the Muslims were driven out of India. In that crucial period, V. P. Singh and the small OBC lobby around him planned the Mandal agenda that disturbed every organized party and the BJP the most of all. The BJP then raised the Mandir-Masjid issue as a diversionary tactic. For the OBCs in the Sangh Parivar it was an occasion where they could use their only asset—muscle power— against the constructed enemy, the Muslims.

When the Sangh Parivar needs mass muscle power it has to turn to the OBCs within and it was in this situation that Advani with the help of Hindutva theoreticians such as Govindacharya worked out mediating language of social engineering for advancing Hindutva. The Advani faction assigned some leadership roles to the OBCs. Kalyan Singh and Vinay Katiyar from Uttar Pradesh, Uma Bharti from Madhya Pradesh, Narendra Modi from Gujarat, and so on, got some positions in the Sangh Parivar. By then the political ambitions of OBC leaders everywhere were whetted, but without a vision for the socio-

spiritual transformation of Indian society. This was aided and abetted by the environment created by the Bahujan Samaj Party's Kanshi Ram with the 'our votes for our seats' slogan.

The BJP made serious efforts, much more than other parties, to include and accommodate the OBCs so as to provide Hindutva with its muscle power. The secularists and communists remained more backward in this strategy than the Hindutva forces. The illiterate OBC masses did not understand the whole debate of secularism, socialism and communalism in relation to their own lives. They understood the Mandal discourse because it gave them some jobs. The communists promised heaven but no OBC was getting a visible place in those theory-centred organizations at the national and regional levels. For such a social mass, the Parivar had a practical solution: participate in muscle power mobilization and get the benefits. After the Babri demolition campaign the OBCs began getting the recognition within Hindu brahminic civil society that they had craved for so long.

Those wanting to be leaders in the Sangh Parivar had only to abuse Muslims in the fiercest language possible. Modi and Bharti could do that well. In the Congress, one needed sophisticated education and the ability to speak the nuanced language of secularism to become a national leader. The P. V. Narasimha Rao period was the real brahminic period of the Congress in which all OBC leaders with some stature were systematically set aside. The communists did not nurture a single OBC leader and even after the Mandal period they sought only alliances with leaders such as Mulayam Singh and Laloo Yadav with all the necessary care to see that their theory remained 'pure'. Now, for the average educated OBC the Hindutva party has become the easy option.

However, it was not as if the temple-centred Hindu priestly class that had been giving full support to leaders such as A. B. Vajpayee and Murli Manohar Joshi was not uneasy with the new visibility of the OBCs. It was. Now that Modi has emerged as the hero of the OBCs within the Parivar, he can even ignore Vajpayee and set his own agenda. For the first time an OBC leader had become praiseworthy for the Brahmin and other upper caste leaders and was in full command of Gujarat—the mini Hindu Rashtra. How could he do that? By deploying the muscle power of the OBCs under his command and asking the upper caste leaders of the BJP to simply supervise his command structure in attacking the imaginary enemy, constructed by the very same brahminic theoreticians, in real, physical terms.

theoreticians, in real, physical terms.

The media, busy retaining the secular image of India, did not realize how an average OBC viewed the rise of such a leader. His cutouts were bigger than those of Vajpayee or Advani. In that atmosphere, a section of the upper castes—particularly Brahmins and Banias—seemed to have moved towards the Congress but the OBCs seemed to have voted en masse for their new hero. There is a lesson here for the secularists and the communists. As Hinduism did not allow Dalits to enter temples, they began to move towards Islam, Christianity and Buddhism. If the secularists and the communists do not allow the OBCs to grow in their organizations Modi will become their national leader and their Prime Ministerial candidate too. And in such a situation, feeble OBC voices like mine will be drowned.

The Hindu, 26 December 2002

PART 2
On Clash of Civilizations

5

A Case of Slipping Morality

The war on Iraq is dividing the world into two major camps. After the 9/11 attack in which the Americans lost life and property, moral strength was with the American bloc. The whole of Europe felt that 9/11 was an attack on European values which had been nurtured and developed on the American continent by the many Europeans who had migrated there. Britain felt the attack on America was an attack on its motherhood of Anglo-American civilization itself. More than any other European country, Britain felt aggrieved over the attack on America because of that historical relationship.

I was in Britain in October 2001 to participate in a seminar. I could sense the paternalistic grief of British civil society and state. The US-British drive against Osama bin Laden's terrorism and their operation against the perceived threat of Iraq can be traced to their shared historical legacy. Though America has people who migrated from several European countries, that all of them became Englishspeaking is reason enough for Britain to feel more paternalistic about American society and culture than any other European country.

During the Afghan war not only European societies but also many other civil societies too supported America, unlike now when many countries and almost all civil societies are opposing the war on Iraq. In the larger global context, terrorism was seen as a social and religious instrument. There was a view that Islamic civil society breeds terrorism and that Christian civil society promotes peace. In this background, the theory of the clash of civilizations appeared almost a truism. Islam was seen to be dogmatic and a source of political dictatorships. Christian civil society that engendered political democracy and civil societal individualism might rightfully clash with the cultural authoritarianism of Islamic civil society and autocratic political systems.

At the time of the Afghanistan attack, America and Britain were on high moral ground. Now that ground has slipped from under their feet while the Islamic

ground. Now that ground has slipped from under their feet while the Islamic world gains it at their expense. The scale of moral righteousness is tilting because of the unethical AmericanBritish attack on Iraq. Last year, when I toured America, I realized that Bush was carrying the church with him as he was seen as a loyal Christian. The community of the church saw Clinton as immoral, unethical, and of course, un-Christian. If a personally moral man/ woman turns the state he/she is heading into an immoral one, the moral and ethical loss to society is greater. Personal morality should be reflected in public and state policy as well. The attack on Afghanistan, by and large, was seen as self-defensive and hence morally right. That was the reason why Bush won the Congress elections with ease, along with the fact that Clinton's global charisma had evaporated into thin air and his personal immorality had become heavy baggage for the Democratic Party.

With the attack on Iraq, Bush and Blair are putting the moral stakes of Anglo-American civil society to great risk. In my personal interactions in America, many put forth justifiable arguments in defence of the attack on Afghanistan as an offensive against terrorist dens. Such an argument sounded plausible in the backdrop of 9/11.

How do they justify the present attack? Leaving aside international public opinion, how does the Christian ethic accept or condone this behaviour by the American state? If the source of organized group terrorism could be traced to the religion that group belongs to, then state terrorism headed by a group of religious people could also be attributed to their religion. The high moral standard that Jesus set for the world, I am sure, does not accept dropping bombs on people from the sky and then sending food and medicine to the wounded.

One issue that Anglo-American civil society has to debate is: how big a gap can one tolerate between civil societal morality and the morality of the state? A secular state cannot operate on totally immoral lines while the civil society of the same nation claims to enjoy a high moral existence. When the moral positions of the state and civil society are going in opposite directions, the civil societal morality ought to influence the direction of the state. By saying this, I am not asking for a morally theocratic state, but for a secular state influenced by the positive morality of its civil society. If Anglo-American church society realizes this and carries the moral baggage of Jesus, then it should have sought to prevail over Bush and Blair when they were taking the American state from a self-defensive position to a war-mongering one, an action that began to erode their moral base. Again, I am not totally justifying the moral ground on which the

Afghan war was fought.

Well, you cannot always show your right cheek when somebody slaps you on your left one. That was possible for Jesus, but not for mortal beings. But how is it that Anglo-American church society that thrives on daily reading of highly imaginative and sacrifice-centred spiritual texts like the Bible can allow the state to be so vengeful? American church society has highly influential evangelists like Billy Graham; should they not intervene? Pope John Paul II is already appealing to stop this war. The rest of the civil societal forces can follow suit.

Islamic civil societies do not have enormous scope for reworking their moral ground. Unlike Christian ones, Islamic civil societies have not produced states as powerful as the Anglo-American coalition, indeed many Islamic states live under Anglo-American suzerainty. Even if they think of a tit-for-tat policy, they cannot meet the might of the Anglo-American states. The Islamists, in turn, might engender more and more terrorist forces to let loose terror on the Anglo-American world. One strength of Anglo-American civil societies is that they have overcome that form of response by passing on that role to the state—which is in a higher stage of evolution— though such a response by the state is not desirable and not always acceptable in the ultimate analysis.

Islamic civil society, or for that matter any other civil society, must enter into a socio-spiritual debate on violence and morality itself. Capitalist and other modes of counter-violence keep leaving vast areas of the world bloody. Cannot civil societies evolve mechanisms to stop this process?

Deccan Chronicle, 1 April 2003

6

A Lesson to Be Learnt

My first ever visit to Europe, to attend a seminar on Dalit rights and development at London and a seminar on UN treaty bodies at the University of Utrecht in the Netherlands, between 20-30 September 2001, came at a time when not only the USA but also Europe was undergoing psychological trauma. For me the experience was a revealing one for a number of reasons. I realized that the post-Durban global discourse on caste and the Dalit question has made a difference to the attitude of Western intelligentsia to the hitherto unknown (to

them) civil societal relations within India. At least some of them seem to have re-examined what they think they know of India in the light of the Durban conference and its discoveries.

While I was at Durban I found that many Europeans and AfroAmericans were surprised to learn that an Indian mode of apartheid called untouchability exists. The seminar on the UN treaty bodies at Utrecht, particularly its focus on economic, social and cultural (ESC) rights, also seemed to open a new chapter of discourse in the realm of human rights in the world. With the growth of terrorism that continually violates human rights on such a large scale, the Western intelligentsia seems to be shifting the discourse from political and civil rights to the ESC rights of people.

But what struck me most in Europe is the non-existence of India—a nation of 100 million people—in the intellectual realm of average Europeans. Maybe the time I was in Europe was not conducive to judging them, as their intellectual abilities were then captivated by Osama bin Laden and the haunting fear of the globalized terrorism that may now be called Ladenism. But it was also a proper time to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the capitalist West. The average European, after the attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York, appeared to go to office, come back home and go to bed with a sense of fear.

Afghanistan, a small country, occupied all the space in the media. Pakistan for them is not a terrorist source nation, as India would have them know, but at the moment a container of terrorism and therefore, in their contingent thinking, on the side of the good. More than concern over what relations they should have with Islamic nations or with India, European minds are full of the fear of Ladenism and the question of how to root it out. But how is it that one incident in America can leave the whole of European society so terrorized?

Ladenism has destroyed the confidence of capitalism itself. Capitalism has grown through a careful negation of religious fundamentalism. Even within the Christian world, religious dogmatism was slowly yet surely set aside. The countries of Europe, each in their own way, sought to establish a thorough spiritual and civil societal democracy within them. Free and equal man-woman relations undermining all religious controls became possible in this mode of liberal capitalist democracy. Meanwhile class inequalities of the world increased so much that the receding colonial West left Third World countries in a bad state of poverty and hunger and then made them permanent debtors by advancing high interest loans. The Europeans are not willing to concede that colonialism

interest lobbies. The Europeans are not willing to concede that colonialism resulted in the massive transfer of capital resources from the colonies to Europe. That is the reason why at the Durban conference the Euro-American nations refused to concede the payment of reparations. The frustration of Third World countries and the casually fabulous wealth of the West are fraught with many intolerable tensions. The feudal fundamentalist mode of Ladenism has been born and nurtured in this troubled global situation.

The Islamic countries, on the other hand, live essentially in spiritual authoritarianism, wherein neither development of capitalism nor political democracy has acquired any autonomous space. Islam, as it has solidified into a religious dogma, does not allow free thinking independent of Quranic thought. As a result, the Islamic countries have a civil society that has a one-dimensional mindset across countries, with no scope for pluralist thought and practice. At the same time most of these countries have not developed strong economies of their own that could match the capitalism of the developed nations that had something to do with the Christian ethic and the civil society that grew from it.

Poverty and unemployment within the Islamic world have reached their peak. In spite of their strong socio-spiritual oneness, serious class differences exist among Muslims wherein feudal Ladenism can have so much wealth to pursue terrorism. The aristocrats and leaders of the Muslim world have been unable to direct the energies of their youth into science and technological progress. Vet the West knows for sure that the Islamic world can twist its arms merely through its power of spiritual oneness. While living in mediaevalism even a society like Afghanistan can put serious demands on the Western world because of the strong social bonding that the religion has been able to construct within Islamic civil society.

India becomes an invisible force in such an international scenario because caste and graded inequalities do not produce the required strength that the capitalist and democratic pluralism of the West has been able to give to European countries. With a Hindutva-based political party at the helm of affairs, even the moral cutting edge that India used to have during the Congress and other coalition regimes has been lost. With the undemocratic approach the Hindutva government adopted at the Durban conference, the Indian rulers have been thoroughly exposed. Now those who know something about India in the West also know that there is a vast untouch able population called the Dalits in India and there is a semi-terrorist organisation called the RSS, which has the full backing of the main ruling party. Thanks to attacks by the RSS on Indian

Christians, about whom the Europeans are concerned, the credibility of the BJP is very low. This is where its diplomatic problems must be located.

The Euro-Americans faced a similar fearsome situation with Hitlerite fascism and the Soviet mode of communism. But both fascism and communism were products of their own ideological construction. Though communism was seen as the enemy of capitalism within Europe, the socialist ideology led to serious political movements in capitalist countries and an enormous project to re-work their economic and socio-cultural relations. Fascism created terror among many and Europe saw the end of it quite quickly. Now what they are facing is entirely different. Ladenism comes from an unexpected source of communalism that has no progressive agenda of its own. It is here that one can see a similarity between Ladenist and RSS communalism. All communalisms have a tendency of ending in terrorism. This is where pure religious ideology needs to be conditioned with secularism, at least for the present.

The Euro-Americans are faced with a terrorism that has deep religious roots. All religious fundamentalisms avoid association with any economic agenda for the abolition of poverty and hunger, since religious fundamentalism has no serious understanding of political democracy. In fact, both Islamic and Hindu fundamentalists have not shown any symptoms of the internal strength necessary to allow science and technology to grow. They have an inwardlooking system of spirituality that does not allow the human being to regenerate with constant innovation. Religious schools use science for destructive purposes but they cannot build positive technology.

The fear of Westerners among Islamic states now is based on the long-drawn-out history of religious wars the world has lived through. The present capitalist and democratic freedoms have their roots in the Christian spiritual democratic ethic that evolved through the contestation of the Bible itself. The Arabic world that was organized into a spiritually homogenized social force under the strong influence of the Quran has slowly degenerated into spiritual authoritarianism without granting liberal democratic scope for socio-political and economic experiments. Islam seems to leave the question of economic development to Quranic thought which is problematic in itself. A system of spiritual thought born in a desert achieved tremendous human homogenization which became a strength of that society. That cultural homogeneity with strong civil societal bonding achieved many things in the early centuries of Islamic formation. But subsequently by clinging to a one-dimensional way of thinking the Islamic societies stagnated. When such a one-dimensional social group decides to use

societies stagnated. When such a one-dimensional social group decides to use advanced capitalist technology for destructive purposes, it can easily do as Ladenism has done. But it cannot construct critical knowledge capable of advancing human progress.

The Europeans are terribly afraid that the advanced instruments of their own innovation can be used against them. To counter that possibility in the psychological realm many Euro-Americans are now suddenly drawn to the church. Prayers are being conducted with the purpose of creating a new ethic in their own civil society, and civilization is suddenly being re-located in the realm of religion. This in itself may lead to a clash of civilizations, perhaps forcing a world war on all humankind. Will Hindutva forces learn from this experience and dismantle the communal networks that they have built to save India from Ladenism and Golwalkarism as well?

Deccan Herald, 9 November 2002

7

The Invisible Country

I visited America recently on the invitation of three universities— Iowa, Columbia and Wisconsin—to participate in debates on the broad themes of caste, race and nation. I also visited Dallas, Chicago, Atlanta, San Diego and Denver on the invitation of Operation Mobilization, one of the largest book-distributing organizations in the world. This being my first-ever visit to America, what struck me most was the invisibility of India as a nation in the US media. India does not figure in any tangible manner in news analyses or in academic and socio-cultural discourses in newspapers and TV channels there. But that is not the case with regard to China and Pakistan. Why does India, the largest democracy in the world, get such treatment from the US civil society?

No doubt, America as a nation is inward looking, but its inwardlooking nationhood was shaken by the 9/11 attacks. There is now a visibly disturbed re-examination of their self in relation to the Islamic world in progress. At one level it appears that America is more worried about its material resources and the infrastructure that it has built for its consumerist culture. But at another level it is seriously trying to re-locate itself in its American Christian ethic. The huge churches have sprawling parking spaces, because the norm is one car per person. In many towns, car companies do not even allow public transport systems to

In many towns, car companies do not even allow public transport systems to come into existence. In small cities like Atlanta and Denver, and even in cities like Dallas, there is hardly any such system. The car industry has made America a country of car individualism.

The Third World countries that are not in a position to challenge the American sense of self in some form or the other will remain invisible because the Americans have built for themselves a complex of superiority both in the realm of the state and that of the civil society. The fault lies with us because the Indian socio-spiritual elite has kept the country under the grip of a spiritual fascism that hates social and spiritual equality and modernity. As a result, our innovative and creative abilities have been negated. In the fields of science and technology we have been made totally dependent on the West. Thus we have become totally invisible to the Western world.

In many circles in America the name of India is not known. When I told the Americans I met there that in India a school kid also knows something about America, they were rather surprised. The Americans suffer from their inwardlooking individualism and a materialistic ego that mostly compares itself with its ancestral European fatherhood. However, England still remains their social, spiritual and political mentor and attracts that respect from many Americans. We must, however, examine why India remains so invisible to America.

America has become the dreamland of the middle, upper middle and ruling classes of India. Those who hate work here would like work there. This is the psychology of self-negation. That is where, moreover, the roots of India's underdevelopment lie. The very same classes ought to be ashamed of keeping the nation's image so low. America has reached a stage where it takes India for granted because we do not have the strength or the will to oppose any of its models.

When the civil society of a nation comes to the conclusion that it has nothing to learn from the other, it treats that other as inconsequential. Since the Indian ruling class does not value its own people it too becomes an invisible class before others. The Indian ruling castes have treated millions within their nation as untouchables and worthless, never thinking that by so doing they killed the national spirit. Now India has reached a stage where there is hardly anything that others would think to learn from it. I noticed at the UN conference on racism at Durban last year that India as a nation does not provide a positive reference point

on any major issue. During my one-month tour of America I felt that I belong to a nation that is as insignificant to the ruling masters of the world as my village in South India is to Delhi. Who should be held responsible for the invisibility of India in the world? Is it the ruling castes, or the Dalit-Bahujans who are seen as meritless people by those who are running after America with a begging bowl in hand? Though America is an imperial state, its people cannot eat without working to earn their bread. American democracy and competitive capitalism have imbibed many principles of socialism. The wealth of America does not allow individuals and families to live without work, which in India is possible. In America, if there are cars with two persons in them, they invariably occupy the front seats. That means there is no lord to sit in the rear seat with a slavish chauffeur to drive him. In America, the rich must drive their own cars as the poor do. In any country where all need to work, the dignity of labour is bound to find roots in its cultural psyche. In the entire world, India is a country that suffers from the highest amount of indignity of labour. Who should be held responsible for this disease of India—the brahminic castes or the Dalit-Bahujans?

The high degree of individualism and the competitive nature of American capital have made the people hard-working as well. This situation has put society to tremendous competition as a car and house have become unavoidable necessities. Youth aged above 18 need to work even as students to pay for the car and accommodation. It was a bit of a surprise for me when a deeply religious parent told me that his own daughter has to pay rent for a portion of the house they share. Such individualism and the familial disjunctions that go with American civil society have made them learn a lot, about the dignity of labour.

There is hardly anything positive in the leisure-centred Hindu joint family system that has been extended to all other religions of India, including Islam and Christianity. The pastor in an American church is not like a Hindu priest who simply sits, recites and eats: In Hinduism, the whole family of the priest lives off his temple income without involving themselves in any physical work. The US pastor works like an employee of the church, taking care of its day-to-day functioning and its administrative apparatus. The churches are childcare centres and they provide free training for children to learn work ethics. They conduct cultural and educational programmes, On Sundays all other institutions remain closed but churches perform all kinds of spiritual and recreational activities. Barring a small number of secular families, all Americans contribute to the church in terms of labour or money. I saw many retired people volunteering for hard physical labour in the church. A Black pastor can preach to Whites and

hard physical labour in the church. A Black pastor can preach to Whites and children of all races are being made to live together.

American public spaces by and large remain clean not because the government imposes fines for defiling them, but because there is an individual civic training that is part of children's upbringing. If a dog owner wants to take out his dog for a walk he has to carry a plastic carrier to clear his dog's shit. No police are around to fine one if one does not do so but such a failure is considered uncivilized. In India, if somebody were to do this, whether for his dog or his own child, he would be treated as a pervert and a brute wallowing in dirt. Indian roads are meant for shit throwing and urinating. Why? Even Hindu temples today are places of dirt. Gandhi made a scathing attack on the dirtiness of Hindu temples. I have heard many stories about Indians spoiling the cleanliness of American public spaces. Hardly any such complaints are made against the Chinese. Chinese food is more popular among the Americans than their own food. Why is Indian food not as popular as that of the Chinese?

Most of the NRIs claim Hindu identity and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad tries to reap a harvest of dollars and export temples to America. When I was in Chicago, the Puri Shankaracharya was there to address a Muslim gathering. He was in his saffron, semi-naked dress with all kinds of ash applied on his body. When he could bear to travel in a modern plane, as he could not create a *pushpaka vimana* (flying chariot) of his own, why doesn't he change that semi-nakedness as well?

The Hindu priestly caste has made the religion a cult that fetches money without work. It is that which has killed the dignity of labour and made us invisible people in the USA. Let us export more brains that suffer from indignity of labour in this country to America so that they may at least live a life of dignified labour there.

Deccan Herald, 30 November 2002

8

Heroes Who Made the World Rock and Roll

Memphis city is on the bank of the Mississippi River. If my general knowledge from back in my student days serves me right, Mississippi is the widest river of the world, and has the distinction of shaping the cultural contours of America.

Having read so much about the river, it was a great joy to see it and also the model of the river constructed on its bank at Memphis. The model shows the various shapes, cuts and sizes of the river's channel with an artificial flow of water. It also shows how some of the important cities developed on the banks of the Mississippi. The beauty of the artificial Mississippi of Memphis must be seen to be believed.

Memphis is known for the birth of rock and roll music and also for the death of Martin Luther King. Now, this city possesses two museums, one dedicated to Martin Luther King and the other to Elvis Presley, the father of rock-and-roll dance and music. Elvis rose to become one of the richest men in America when he was barely 30, whereas Martin Luther King died rather poor as he spent all his resources building up the civil rights movement. He was only 39 when he died, and though he was one of the youngest Nobel Laureates, he left nothing for his family. Elvis too died very young. I knew about the brutal killing of King at Memphis, but I did not know much about Elvis Presley, as I was never very keen on dance and music before my Memphis visit.

But after I began to interact with Black people, particularly after a visit to South Africa, I became curious about Black music. Black music and dance are essentially related to Black people's struggles, their victories and defeats. Elvis, though White, picked up the cultural life of Blacks and made their rock-and-roll his own. He made a fortune out of his newfound cultural idiom, and was perhaps the first to make such massive wealth out of music and dance. Elvis had two private planes—one big and one small—and a huge mansion with acres of land around. His house is now a museum dedicated to him, where his two planes are also stationed for the visitors' benefit. Elvis had perhaps made many friends from the Black community in his childhood, and in the company of Blacks and coloured people, he picked up the Black rock-and-roll style.

Elvis' daughter married Michael Jackson and eventually got divorced from him. In Memphis, there is a large population of Blacks. The Black body, as long as it exists, keeps moving, twisting and dancing. A Black physique combines work, song and music. And it is this confluence that probably impressed Elvis.

Black people keep singing as if it is the natural way to be. I experienced this in South Africa, and also saw it in America. When a United Nations conference on racism took place, the South African people treated the delegates to their dance and music. I had seen how the Black church functions, and differs from the church of the Whites at Raleigh too. So I went to the Black church, called the

church of the Whites at Raleigh too. So I went to the Black church, called the International Church, to see how it looks, with a curiosity to learn about different cultures. What I saw in that church was dance, music, singing, laughing and weeping in joy, not in sorrow. The whole church was practically swinging from one end to the other. It was as if they made God sing and dance, and only then did they leave the church.

In comparison, the White church operates in silence with occasional singing and music. A White church is a relatively wealthy spiritual centre, but lacks the cultural valour of a Black church, which is a vibrant centre of recreation and regeneration, though it may not be as wealthy as a White church. The national wealth, it appears, is in the hands of Whites.

Elvis, though born White, seemed to have transformed himself into a Black in body and mind. He loved the Black melody, Black beauty and Black cultural environment. His dress code was that of Black people. Within 150 years of their struggle in America, the Blacks had produced many cultural icons, who also influenced the Whites, among them Elvis. The Blacks created a cultural influence on the Whites as they struggled to retain their cultural identity and hegemonized it over a period of time after the civil war broke out in America. The civil war was a turning point in their cultural history. They put their souls out there with pride.

For an oppressed community, sustaining their cultural pride was a historical condition for advancement. The Blacks proved this point with vigour and tenacity. They learnt to become wealthy, and also learnt to sacrifice whatever riches they amassed in their lifetimes.

If Martin Luther King is a standing example of sacrifice, Oprah Winfrey is a living example of legitimate wealth-amassment. The Oprah TV show keeps Whites glued to the screen, and the *Oprah* journal sells like hot cakes. Oprah has gained that status by teaching family values and morality to the whole of America—more so the Whites. Isn’t that great?

Martin Luther King with his speeches made the whole American nation rock and roll. He was one of the most moving orators the world has ever produced. He did not earn money, but enormous fame. He spent all his Nobel Prize money on advancing the cause of Black civil rights. Incidentally, he was the youngest man to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. While still in his thirties, he made the whole world sit up and think about his speeches, his glorious struggles, his non-violent methods.

violent methods.

The federal government has spent huge sums of money to transform the two hotels where King stayed and was shot dead on 4 April 1968 into a museum. The hotels where he and his killers stayed exist side by side. These two hotels constitute the massive Museum of Martin Luther King. It is the experience of a lifetime to see this museum. The story of his entire struggle, including the bus where the first Black woman's protest started at Alabama, has been recreated in that museum so that visitors get a true feel of the civil rights movement.

Many think the Americans did not lose their history vis-ä-vis the Europeans. They preserved their history with tenacity. They adopted the English language as a national language, but built a different history and a culture of their own. This is a good example for those who argue that if India adopts English as the national language, it will lose its history and culture. History and culture are different from language. The Blacks of America also lost their language, but they did not lose their culture.

Though the Blacks had major complaints about the White bias in the course of American history, with the emergence of Martin Luther King, the Blacks got their due place. Martin Luther King's life is a good example of how a determined, intelligent and principled man or woman can reshape the history of a whole race that had been suppressed for centuries.

Elvis Presley and Martin Luther King came from two different races but they converged at one point. They understood the historical merit and value of Black culture, art, music and spirituality. For the development of the world, there is a need for hybridization of cultures that develop among the productive classes, races and castes with the cultures of the leisured classes, races and castes.

In India, this is where the serious need for recognition of the Dalit-Bahujan culture, music and art arises.
Deccan Chronicle, 6 August 2003

PART 3
On Social Justice

9

A Paradigm Shift

Ambedkar's image is growing day by day. To start with he was an untouchable with the baggage of untouchability of three thousand

years. The system of caste and untouchability have behind them a

highly successful ideology of social fascism, which Ambedkar had to

encounter throughout his life. Ambedkar realized that the roots of

this social fascism are in what I prefer to call spiritual fascism but

what he termed Hinduism.

Ambedkar started first as a Dalit scholar with a sharp academic mind. Then he moved on to become a world class legal thinker. His

writings start with the essay 'Caste in India' written in 1916 and end

with 'Buddha or Karl Marx' in 1956. Not that he did not write anything before and after these classical essays, but these two are landmark essays which run from the beginning of a scholarly life that ended with the kind of brilliance few people before him had been

able to exhibit. In between, he wrote his creative classics like *The Annihilation of Caste*, and *Who Are the Shudras*? He wrote a monumental work showing the path of liberation for the whole of the oppressed castes in general and untouchable castes in particular: *The Buddha and His Dhamma.* Between these projects, he also drafted

the politically and legally liberative document for all Indians—the

Indian Constitution.

Unlike Gandhi and Nehru, Ambedkar started his postgraduate writing life as a sociologist. His degrees and doctoral studies diversified into economics. When he began to battle with Indian civil society and its brahminic barbarity, he entered the study of the law with the thought of silencing Manu forever. That path led him to study

the source of positive and negative religious philosophies in the

world. He made an exhaustive comparative study of religions and

came to the conclusion that in order to rebuild India as a modern

nation Hinduism as a religion must be annihilated. He thought that

in its place spiritually democratic religions must be nurtured and

grown. To achieve that goal he embraced Buddhism and ended his

life in the tradition of Buddha, as a Mahabodhi.

Ambedkar built his name and fame brick by brick, in the larger than life cause that he took up—transforming India and the world.

His project was to make equality between a Dalit and a Brahmin,

between a Black and a White, a possibility. He learnt lessons from

Black liberation in the USA. He worked out a comprehensive

scheme of liberation—social, political, economic and spiritual. In the

modern period, for example, Karl Marx thought of only social, economic and political liberation but left the question of spiritual liberation untouched. Gandhi thought of social, political and spiritual liberation but completely ignored the problem of economic liberation of the people. Only Ambedkar thought about all the four processes of liberation. Therein lies his greatness.

Nowhere in the world has a spiritual and philosophic thinker resorted to writing a Constitution. Spiritual thinkers do not believe in scholarship. They simply

believe in wisdom—if not in divine wisdom. But Ambedkar combined both wisdom and scholarship. In all his theoretical writings he comes to us as a scholar. In his writing of

the Constitution he comes to us as one of the greatest jurists. By

embracing Buddhism and by causing it to revive on the scale as it

has now, he has moved into prophethood.

Ambedkar's Constitution significantly changed the course of Indian life. But now, Hindutva forces cannot achieve their goal without dismantling Constitutional governance in India. Once that dismantling begins, all the Ambedkarites—Buddhists, Christians, Muslims—will have to rebel against the whole Hindu order. When there is conflict between the Constitution and the Hindutva forces, the

OBCs who have no independent position on Hindutva as an ideology and Hinduism as a religion will have nowhere to run. This is what they will have to realize.

Dismantling Ambedkar's Indian Constitution is a sure way to

bring back Manu's dispensation. The biggest losers in that course will

be the OBCs. By then the SCs would have become either Buddhists

or Christians with international linkages of their own. Ambedkar as a

modern prophet will protect those who dissociate themselves from

Hinduism but not those who would like to live as social slaves.

Deccan Herald, 14 April 2003

10

Attacks on Ambedkar

B. R. Ambedkar has become a source of social tension and a subject of debate in the national media. Suddenly, attacks on his statues have increased and his role in the freedom struggle has been maligned by Arun Shourie in his book *The Worshipping of False Gods.* In other words, two modes of denigrating Ambedkar have come into

play—the desecration of his statues and the denigrating of his public

image. These processes have led to mass Dalit Buddhist protests and

loss of life as well as the burning of Shourie's book and a demand for

its ban by Members of Parliament headed by the former minister,

G. Venkat Swamy. The demand for banning the book is undemocratic

and the burning of it is unwarranted. Ambedkarites can certainly withstand such attacks and fight back democratically.

If Shourie's book and the Mumbai mode of planned attacks are looked at in conjunction, it becomes apparent that each sustains the

other. In fact, the book has been written to set Hindutva forces

against the Ambedkarites, most of whom happen to be Buddhists.

Shourie has portrayed Ambedkar and his Buddhism as inimical to

Hinduism and the reconciliation course that some Hindutva sections

are adopting as detrimental to Hindu Brahminism.

Though he is broadly operating within the Vishwa Hindu

Parishad mode of thinking, Mr. Shourie's real objective is to give

new life to Hindutva, which received a major bashing after the

demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992. He is part of a strong lobby

within Hindutva that feels that Gandhi, who was killed by the representatives of

the RSS, has to be won back into the fold of Hindutva if it is to sustain its hegemony. They seem to think that the debate that

Mayawati raised by counterposing Gandhi to Ambedkar can be used

to their advantage by attacking Ambedkar on all fronts. Thus, they

perhaps think that a social polarization of Gandhian Hinduism and

Ambedkarite Buddhism could be set in motion.

Clearly, most of the Hindutva-inclined intellectuals are upset at the growing influence of Ambedkar both in civil and political society. This is clear when Shourie in the very introduction of his book says, 'None is idolized these days the way [Ambedkar] is. His statue

is one of the largest in the Parliament complex. His portrait in the

Central Hall of Parliament is larger than life. His statues, dressed in

garish blue, holding a copy of the Constitution, have been put up in

city after city... [statues] that by now outnumber those of Gandhiji.'

The tone and rhetoric is intolerant.

Constructing such contending images of Gandhi and Ambedkar has its own underpinnings in terms of the Hindu and Buddhist religions. Gandhi and Ambedkar invoked different symbols in their discourses in order to root their struggles in their own historical legacies. Gandhi used symbols like Rama and the Bhagavad Gita,

whereas Ambedkar invoked the symbol of Buddha and critiqued

Rama, Krishna and the Gita. In the context of the Bahujan Samaj

Party's aggressive campaign of building Ambedkar villages and

Ambedkar statue chowks in Uttar Pradesh—heartland of the Hindu

hegemony—instigative writings such as those of Shourie may lead

to further social tensions. It is true that he has couched his communal

politics in the language of nationalism. But he does not seem to realize that there can be several forms of nationalism, and that when the shaping of nationalism is done in the interest of caste or class,

the idea of nationalism loses its essence.

For millions of untouchables, a person like Ambedkar, who consistently fights for a space for their human dignity, appears a better nationalist. Thus, Gandhi and Ambedkar are two different sides of

Indian nationalism: one cannot be set against the other. In a political polarization that attacks Gandhi, as Mayawati did some time ago, or attacks Ambedkar as Shourie and the Shiv Sainiks in

Maharashtra have done, a new mode of communalism may be deployed. The trend among educated Dalits and among a section of Sudras (OBCs and others) to convert to Buddhism is increasing. In

all the conversion *mahasanghas* (meetings), photographs of the Buddha and Ambedkar are invariably displayed.

Shourie's attack on Ambedkar also suggests that the Hindutva forces do not want to treat Buddhism as part of nationalist Hinduism

as many Hindu writers did during and subsequent to the freedom

struggle. They seem to think that if Buddhism becomes a major religious force, Brahminism will lose its supremacy. In the post-Independence context, for the new social forces, particularly the Dalits, the revival of Buddhism provides an international space. Writings

like that of Shourie certainly force educated Dalits to consolidate on

religious lines. Though he attempts to construct Gandhi as a Hindu

thinker in the mould of Vivekananda, Shourie cannot convince many

on this score because Gandhi was murdered by the Hindutva forces

themselves.

Unlike Vivekananda, Gandhi was critical of Hinduism since he actually shared a lot with Ambedkar on the question of the removal

of untouchability and the granting of reservations. Their appreciation

and criticism of each other was democratic. Since they did not compromise on some basic issues, it is possible to represent them as fanatical, but representing either one of them as antinational is nothing but mean.

Gandhi and Ram Manohar Lohia were two upper caste persons who took a stand on reforming the caste system in a radical way, as

Ambedkar did. Both belonged to the Bania caste and knew from their

own experience, as persons coming from the third group in the castebound social hierarchy, that caste as an institution would never allow democracy to survive. No Brahmin leader felt as strongly as Gandhi

and Lohia about transforming the caste system. Why, then, does

Shourie want to gloss over the fact that Gandhi and Ambedkar acknowledged each other's roles? It is also a fact, however, that Ambedkar's main agenda was the annihilation of caste. He was an

organic Dalit leader, thinker and fighter; he gave the Dalits a religious, cultural and political identity. As more and more Dalits get their own space in the system, they also enlarge Ambedkar's importance in history.

During the last fifty years of Independence, the social forces that occupied privileged socio-political spaces assigned an enormous

importance to Gandhi and Nehru. That is because the forces that

have entered and occupied privileged national spaces thought that

they owed all that to Gandhi and Nehru. In future, Ambedkar is

likely to occupy more space in the national field for the same reason. If this expansion of Ambedkar's importance is communalized, India will enter a new

phase of communal clashes between the

brahminical Hindus and the Ambedkarite-Buddhists. Hindutva intellectuals like Mr. Shourie do not realize that what they are doing may also lead to a civil war like the one that took place over the issue of

slavery in America during Abraham Lincoln's time.

As of today, the Dalit question is basically a caste question. The Arun Shourie type of writing may well convert it into a question of

religion because more and more educated SCs and OBCs are converting themselves to Buddhism. Buddhism, thus, is being identified with Ambedkar and the Dalits. The Dalit-Buddhist struggle in the

context of the desecration of Ambedkar's statues in Mumbai points

in the same direction.

Using Gandhi's theory of non-violence as a cover, Shourie tries to prove that Ambedkar was a believer in violence. How does he explain the whole tradition of violence in the Hindu pantheon? No Hindu deity was portrayed as a believer in non-violence nor can the

Gita be explained away as a non-violent text. That is where the dilemma of the Gandhian theory of non-violence lies. Tragically for Hindutva, Gandhi was killed by a fundamentalist Hindu, not by an

Ambedkarite. The Buddhist tradition, which Ambedkar identified

with, never believed in suppressing an enemy by using violent

methods. Even in Ambedkar's practice there is no incident where he

encouraged the killing of enemies. The facts actually tell a different

story: it is the Dalits who have suffered enormous violence. The occasions on which they resorted to violence are few and far between.

Writing a most powerful song in response to Shourie's vitriolic attacks on the Dalits and Ambedkar, the Dalit revolutionary and

Telugu poet Gaddar asked, ‘Shourie, what do you know about the

pangs of hunger?/ We fertilize the black soil with our blood./ That

soil blossoms into blood-red roses./ When you Brahmins use them

for your puja./ We play the drums outside the temple./ Ask! where is

Ambedkar?/ Look in the *Dalitwada/* He is the burning candle that lights every house.’ Gaddar describes the emotional attachment that

each Dalit has to Ambedkar. Our nationalism will be more united if

we understand this feeling of the Dalits.

The Hindu, 30 August 1997

11

The Bard Whose Song Is His Weapon

Gaddar, the famous poet, singer and performer, is a good example of a man who has embodied many ‘institutions’ in his struggle to reshape the very structure of Indian caste/class hierarchies. On 6 April 1997, he was shot at his residence by suspected police agents. He

had a miraculous escape.

Why did a democratic state—through its armed agency, the police—attempt to assassinate him? It would not be an exaggeration to argue that if Russia has produced a Gorky, China a Lu Hsun, India

has produced a Gaddar. Of course, there is one significant difference

among Gorky, Lu Hsun and Gaddar. Both Gorky and Lu Hsun wrote

novels and short stories and became universally known writers.

Gaddar became a greater literary and cultural figure by writing songs,

and by singing and performing them. The illiterate, semi-literate

masses and intellectuals of all hues throng to listen to him. The

popular press in Andhra has acknowledged him not only as a great

creative mind, or a ‘steel body’ that has withstood bullets, but as a

man of melodious voice.

Gaddar began to compose songs, sing and perform when he was barely fifteen years old (he is now 50). He went through many twists

and turns ideologically. As a child born in a Dalit (Mala) family, he

worked as a child labourer and became an Ambedkarite. While a student of engineering at Osmania University, he was attracted to Marxism and Maoism. He wrote hundreds of songs that gave literary expression to the lives of DalitBahujans, the working classes and

women. The song, for Gaddar, became a literary weapon.

Under the influence of a ‘caste-blind’ Indian Marxism it once appeared that he had moved away from Ambedkarism. However, his

songs retained the connecting thread between caste and class exploitation. An early song that won the hearts of the Telugu people was written around the life-experience of his mother.

‘O Mother Lachumamma, your blouse is torn,

Your hair is soiled, your sari is in rags,
You have no money to buy new ones.
Even in that condition what have you done?

You planted saplings, walking backwards like a bull,

In order to produce food from the mud.’

He educated the rural masses about their innate self, their creativity and the inhuman exploitation to which they are subjected, through

his singing and performing. It was no accident that Gorky's most popular novel is about the mother's role in revolution. Gaddar's most popular song is also about a Dalit mother's role in the production of wealth and in sustaining the socio-political institutions of India.

Gaddar used a powerful song by another Dalit poet, Guda Anjaiah, to educate the masses of the village poor about their class/caste identity. When Gaddar sings 'Ee Vuru Manadira' (this village is ours), hundreds and thousands of people join in chorus. In the popular psyche this song is most associated with Gaddar as it delineates his ideology. He constructs the working class/caste self in terms of 'we' not T—the villagers ours, the *wada* is ours, the cart is ours, and the bulls that draw the cart are ours. It goes on to challenge the institution of landlordism—who is this *dora*? Why should he exploit and humiliate us?

Typically, Gaddar's performances start with a 'red salute to martyrs'. From the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s, Gaddar wrote many songs about the martyrs who laid down their lives in the cause of social change. He uses the basic DalitBahujan language, idiom and symbolism by completely transforming the linguistic structure of literary Telugu. Before Gaddar emerged on the Telugu revolutionary literature scene, most writers belonged to the upper caste/middle class and landlord background. Their Telugu was rooted in Sanskrit while Gaddar's writings draw upon linguistic structures, idioms, proverbs and euphemisms of the illiterate, productive masses—what is more, of a Telengana dialect which finds no place

in written texts. Gaddar, thus, was the first organic Telengana intellectual who established a link between the producing masses and the literary text and, of course, that text established a link between

the masses and higher educational institutions. Even before

Gaddar, powerful poets like Joshua had established a reputation in

the Telugu literary field. But Gaddar used the song form to communicate to the masses a vision of restructuring the institutions of family, private property, civil society and the state. Symbols that

are normally considered negative in the Hindu-brahminical tradition, figure as the most positive ones in his poetry.

Post-Mandal, Gaddar began to rework his literary frame from a class-centred discourse to a caste-centred one, and with this shift

began to acquire a mass base beyond the ambit of Marxist-Leninist

organizations. With every passing year he made an increasing impact

on the festive Ambedkar Jayanti celebrations. While the state resisted his presence at state-organized functions, the Dalit masses, including those who disagreed with his Marxism, welcomed Gaddar.

He was now seen as an icon of the DalitBahujans. Gradually his influence spread to cinema and through it, his imagery, language and songs became part of the middle class.

Earlier, Gaddar had been a convener of the Jana Natya Mandali, a cultural organization. Slowly, he himself became an institution, a

cultural symbol of social change. This provided a new impetus to his

song-writing and he began to reach out to various social sections

through new platforms. This shift becomes clear in his famous song,

'Arun Shourigo neeku aakalibademeruka' (O Arun Shourie, what do you know about the pangs of hunger?). Though a reply to Arun Shourie's

attack on Ambedkar, it covers the entire gamut of antagonistic relations between unproductive Brahmins and productive DalitBahujans. He writes, *'Nallani regallalo nethurithanameste'* (we fertilize the black soil with our blood) and our blood is reborn as *nethuru gulabi* (blood rose). He shows how this red rose is taken away for a

brahminical puja, pushing away the Dalits who grew it. He then says,

'pujakada nuvvunte bajakada momuntam' (while you will be at the puja, we will be playing drums outside the temple). He informs the

people that Brahminism is invariably Kautilyan in character.

In another song he writes,

'Bapanoni netthi tene busina katthi' (The head of a Brahmin is a honey-coated knife). The shift to

Ambedkarism is clear. The state, the ruling castes (Kamma, Reddy

and Vellama) and the Brahmins in the bureaucracy increasingly began to feel insecure with this shift. Their insecurity deepened after NTR's death, for should Gaddar enter electoral politics, given his

popularity, a totally new alignment of forces could take place. This

is because, given the revolutionary traditions in Andhra Pradesh, the

DalitBahujans here, unlike their compatriots in North India are far

more politicized. Further, there exists a new social base of organic

intellectuals to rework institutional relationships.

Going beyond his role as poet, singer and performer, Gaddar recently tried to forge a unity between the Madigas and Malas (two major Dalit communities of AP). They were on the verge of a split,

breaking the bloc formation of Dalit communities. He not only wrote

a song, '*Yeyyiria dandorei…*' (Beat the drum, beat…), but also became the

convener of a forum which reflected the spirit of ‘divide the booty (of reservation) and unite at the socio-political plane’. This

was a turning-point in his life. He became a steel bridge, a new rallying point between the divided communities.

The Dalit movement had produced a number of organic intellectuals by the time the Mandal struggle began in the 1990s.

These intellectuals re-examined the negative/positive cultural ethos and the associated economic structures. They realized that in the new struggle of identities, the DalitBahujan family, wada and

caste associations could provide cultural resources to run the institutions of state and civil society. Gaddar’s songs began to influence this process. For all organic Dalit thinkers, administrators, writers

and artists, the space that Gaddar came to occupy in the institutions

of mass communication—was itself a source of encouragement. No

poet, singer, performer or actor from a Dalit background had so far

managed an effective entry into the institutions of communication.

He thus broke through many historical barriers. On several occasions he occupied the front pages of newspapers. This does not reflect the generosity of the press, but Gaddar’s saleable image; he

is a darling of the masses. He creates an emotional wave in the

audience when he appears in a shepherd’s costume with rows of

small bells attached to his ankles. Gaddar’s appearance in these

media has increased their sales.

Gaddar saw the close relationship between backwardness and encounter killings, as also the killings of police personnel in the violence and counter-violence. Unlike the average member of the People’s War Group, Gaddar felt deeply hurt by any killing. It is in

such an environment that he campaigned against encounter killings. He went around and ‘seized’ the dead bodies of persons killed in encounters. The police agencies, of course, were incensed, as they felt that he was not sufficiently against the ‘blast killings’ of police personnel. Gaddar’s efforts in the field of human rights created major problems for the state. His emotional involvement with the issue of encounter deaths began with the killing in the city of a PWG leader, a person whom he had introduced to the party. On this occasion, he ran into the Assembly building and into the High Court wearing his costume, creating a sensation. He was arrested in the first week of February 1997. The Dalit-Ambedkarite organizations, the Bahujan Republican Party and Dalit welfare associations took on the responsibility of securing his unconditional release. Within a week of his arrest he was freed. On his release from jail, he became the convener of a committee against encounter killings. For him 1997 thus became a year of mass activity culminating in his facing bullets.

Such a situation is uncommon. Gaddar’s juggling of different roles has kept the state apparatus on tenterhooks. Chandrababu Naidu, who succeeded in driving out his father-in-law, senses a new danger in Gaddar’s growing popularity. But more important, the ruling casteclasses (Kamma, Reddy, Vellama landlords, industrialists and businessmen) see a major threat in this Dalit icon of art and literature who may well become a political leader using votes, not bullets, to capture power. Gaddar stands out as a unique example of a person

from the literary and cultural field who influenced both civil society

and state institutions. For him the family, caste wada, villages and cities are centres of production relations. His theoretical discourse, which posits *matti chetulu* (the hands that turn mud into food) as the source of all production and social existence, combines Marxism and

Ambedkarism to show how the *matti manushulu* (the human beings who have constant interaction with soil and nature—SCs, STs, OBCs)

have no self of their own; that they are alienated from their very

being through institutions such as caste, class, patriarchy and

the state.

His songs critique all existing institutions. For him family is a *mogoni rajyam* (man's kingdom), caste is a Brahmin *rajyam* (kingdom of Brahmins) and the state is an *agrakula dopidi rajyam* (kingdom of upper caste exploitation). In all these structures, power relations are

moulded so as to serve the interests of the strong. *Mogollanollallo beedilai kaletollam* (We, women burn as cigars in the mouths of men), nindu amasanaadu O Lachagummadi, Aada pilla puttinaadi O Lachagummadi… (if a girl is born on a no-moon day, the mother is forced to throw her away); in all his songs about women, the institution of

the family comes under attack. He then attacks the caste system arguing that Dalit lives are not only *matti battukulu* (the lives that live in soil) but they are *yeti battukulu* (bonded lives) as well. Through his rhythmic compositions he critiques the institutions of family, caste,

bonded labour, child labour and unpaid female labour. For him these

labour processes, instead of being creative, self-energizing and selfliberating are self-enslaving. Gaddar, however, perceives the state as the central institution which shapes and moulds other institutions. It

is not surprising that many of his songs focus on the state and capture

of state power

of state power.

Gaddar's theorization relates every form of exploitation to imperialism. Of his many songs about imperialism, a recent one on the emergence of America as the unipolar power has acquired the status

of a classic. He sings, 'Look at that side, the American is coming.

Early morning he comes in the form of toothpaste, in the afternoon

he comes in the form of Coca Cola and in the evening in the form of

rum and whisky. To control our consciousness, he lives with us in the

form of Star TV.' In this narrative he posits that the struggle between

the Indian nation and American imperialism is taking the form of a

struggle between 'Coca Cola and *kobbari baondam'*.

Now in his fiftieth year, Gaddar has experienced the full circle of life: untouchability, child labour, discrimination in school and college, in employment (he worked as a clerk in a bank for nearly seven years), life in jail, being underground, and finally the taste of bullets.

However, he has not allowed his engagement with the masses to turn

sentimental, preferring a dialectical relationship of study, struggle

and criticism rather than blind faith. Instead of bullets killing him, he

has killed them. Though one bullet is still lodged in his 'steel body',

it has not deterred him from writing better songs and singing with

greater vigour for the liberation of the toiling, exploited DalitBahujan masses of our country.

Deccan Chronicle, 20 August 1997

Countering the Counter-Revolution

Ever since the [former] President of India, K. R. Narayanan, gave his two historic speeches—one on the occasion of Republic Day and the

other to Parliament—the Sangh Parivar and the intelligentsia around

it have been trying to damn him as a Congress(I) man. But what he

did was only to counter the counter-revolutionary process under way

among the ‘parivarites’ of the NDA government. Narayanan, a sensitive democrat whose journey to the presidency began from the ‘untouchable’ social base of Kerala and who has experienced the pangs of poverty and untouchability himself, seems to have realized that a

constitutional counter-revolution was in the offing. It appears he was

prepared to play the Lincolnite role from within.

Seen from two angles, the Constitution of India becomes a revolutionary document, as important as is the Proclamation of the Paris Commune: *(i)* The Dalits, Sudras and Adivasis, like the wretched of France, got socio-political and economic rights that were denied by

the socio-political system based on the *Manu Dharma Shastra* and *Arthashastra* and entrenched in India over the centuries, only with the adoption of this Constitution; *(ii)* For the Dalits who suffered the extreme cruelty of untouchability, the fact that Ambedkar, who rose

from that very base, was the man behind the Constitution, provided

an emotional attachment to it which they see as the most important

instrument for their liberation. Parivarite intellectuals such as Arun

Shourie, by their pronounced attack on Ambedkar, seek to cut this

emotional link When the Sangh Parivar, whose silence on social

reform of the Hindu system is deafening, initiates a constitutional review, the

DalitBahujans cannot trust that the exercise will propose changes in their interest.

A careful reading of the text of the President's speeches makes it clear that he too fears an impending danger to the Constitution which

made his journey from a 'Dalit-*wada* to the Presidency' possible.

His is not just a personal journey; it is the symbol of a transformation

in the making. The parivarites want to cut the link between the

President and the DalitBahujans on the one hand, and the Left and

democrats who saw a pro-poor President in Narayanan, on the other,

by projecting his speeches as partisan statements of the Congress(I).

When Narayanan said 'Today when there is so much talk about revising the Constitution or even writing a new Constitution, we

have to consider whether it was the Constitution that failed or we

who have failed the Constitution', he shifted the focus of the debate

from the document to the personnel who handled it in the past and

are handling it now. In his earlier speech, he had already talked about

the two classes, one which 'guzzles aerated beverages' and the other

which 'has to make do with palmfuls of muddied water' and also created conditions in which 'our satellites shoot up from the midst of the hovels of the poor… Our three-way fast-lane which does not

have a safe pedestrian crossing … ' Who are these pedestrians? Do

not they mainly constitute the DalitBahujans?

The NDA government is essentially right wing. The Sangh

Parivar forces that operate behind the BJP ministers believe in a

Parivar forces that operate behind the BJP ministers believe in a Hindu society and are pushing it to the core of the state. The lifting of the ban on Gujarat government employees joining the RSS was one such move. Vajpayee as Prime Minister 'certified' that it was a 'great cultural organization'. The nation now knows that proposals to communalize the state come from various quarters of the Parivar and the Prime Minister allows this to go on. The President in the interest of the country decided to caution the whole nation itself. He rightly used the issue of constitutional review.

The Constitution is an instrument meant to re-frame relations within civil society. In every clause, care has been taken to ensure that the state in its functioning weakens the hold of religion on civil society. Ambedkar attempted to reduce the influence of the Hindu religion within civil society as he felt that the caste inequalities and structural disabilities that this religion had caused needed to be removed. The notion of secularism that was made the basic philosophy of the Constitution, is pervasive in every clause. The way the principle of reservation was introduced was also meant to weaken the brahminic grip on the state and civil society.

When M. N. Venkatachalaiah faced the wrath of students in Hyderabad after he became the chairman of the review commission, he said it would retain untouched the social securities enshrined in the Constitution for weaker sections. Such promises will evaporate into thin air when pressures from the parivar build up. In reviewing

or rewriting the Constitution, no scholarship or knowledge of several Constitutions of the world will be any guarantee of a better life for the poor and the suppressed. Along with knowledge are needed a mind and a body which have experienced the conditions of the poor and the suppressed. It also needs an emotional internalization of at least some values of the suffering. The Constitution inherited such values as many freedom fighters—more so Ambedkar and Gandhi—internalized them. Precisely for this reason, the composition of the Venkatachalaiah Commission does not inspire confidence among the masses. Judges are not in touch with the masses. Only one politician, P. A. Sangma, has found a place in the commission as he is dead set against a particular politician. There is no greater tragedy than individuals becoming the cause of review of a nation's Constitution.

There is a possibility of the viewpoints of many judges on the commission and of the Parivarites converging at the philosophical level if not at the organizational level. In such a situation, a social movement alone can check the constitutional counter-revolution that is in the offing. It is here that the President's warning, 'Beware of the fury of the patient and long suffering people,' should have a serious impact on the nation. It is a call to checkmate the constitutional counter-revolution. The questions in his first speech, go beyond the scope of the Constitution. He raised issues that pertain to the nature of our civil society, environment and whole development.

The BJP could have initiated steps for reforming Hindu religion that has

The BJP could have initiated steps for reforming Hindu religion that has fragmented society irreparably over the centuries rather than

attempt to review the Constitution which tried to stitch it together

over five decades. Its silence on the reform of Hinduism and its concern for the reform of the Constitution are really worrisome trends.

The DalitBahujans and democratic forces must be on guard.

The Hindu, 20 March 2000

13

Hindutva and the War-Loving Self

Talking about the need for nuclear bombs, one of the RSS leaders has said: 'When Rama carries a bow and arrow, or when Lord Krishna

holds the *sudarshan chakra*, they are used only for the welfare of humanity,' implying thereby that the Atal Behari Vajpayee government carries nuclear bombs in its basket for the welfare of Indian society.

Let us recall the famous English saying: 'God is created in the image

of man,' and it is evident that the Hindu Gods were created in the

image of brahminical men. It never strikes the Hindutva forces that

the resolving of contradictions that emerge between people—national or international—by weapons, brutalizes human societies. We know for certain that the test-firing Of nuclear bombs—the most dangerous weapons that human society has so far produced—within two months of the Hindutva forces coming to power is an expression of

Hindutva's historically established behaviour of using threats to control the other. This *dandaniti* worked for centuries against the Sudras, Chandalas and Adivasis. But does it work against other nations that

are as nationalist as the Hindutva forces? We produced five 'Hindutva

bombs': in retaliation Pakistan produced six 'Islamic bombs'. The

Hindu nationalists have no Hindu-nation friends (except poor

Nepal), but Pakistan has not only Islamic friends but Buddhist-Marxist friends (like China). Such isolation faced by the imagined, not-yet-constructed, Hindu-India will become self-destructive.

Since the production of nuclear bombs is being carried out in the name of nationalism, let us look at the different nationalist traditions

this very same country has produced. Nationalist Hindu thought expressed itself in two different modes: that of Bal Gangadhar Tilak and that of Mahatma Gandhi. Tilak's militant Hindu nationalism was expressed in an essay that Tilak wrote on the bomb. The bomb, according to him, resolved the contradictions between British colonialism and Hindu nationalism. In Tilak's scheme, it was expected that the

mobilization of Hindu social forces to fight against British armed

might would be done through the Vinayak Chaturthi festival. Besides, the extremist group headed by Tilak had produced bombthrowers with a sense of extreme patriotism like Bhagat Singh, Sukh Dev and Rajguru, whose extremism had its way for quite some time.

The mode of Hindu nationalism within the contours of the Hindu *shastras* and scriptures constructed by Gandhi was different. The Gandhian praxis restricted the nationalist discourse within the JainBuddhist principle of *ahimsa,* but at the same time attempted to reformulate the antagonistic relationship between Hindu-Brahmin *himsavad*and JainBuddhist *ahimsavad.* This was a strange synthesis.

Ahimsa was never granted any significant space within even *sanatan* (orthodox) Hinduism. The BJP, with all its rhetoric, believes only in

himsavad, and their himsavad is, in a way, different from that of

Tilak's *himsayuta* nationalism.

Ambedkar, who emerged as a Buddhist practitioner of politics, believed that ahimsa should be the core principle of nation building.

In his booklet *Buddha or Karl Marx,* he writes: '*Himsa*, if it is necessary, should be used as energy, but not as creed.' In this respect, both Gandhi and Ambedkar have a certain similarity in their views on resolving conflicts between nations, peoples and socio-political groups.

The BJP-led government conducted five nuclear tests within two and a half months of its coming to power, taking the nation by surprise. It conducted those tests on the birthday of Gautama Buddha, 11 May, and it again used the very same code phrase that the Indira

Gandhi government used in 1974—'The Buddha Smiled'. Though

Indira Gandhi conducted that test in the backdrop of the 1971 IndoPak war, not many Indians welcomed it.

The BJP led the destruction of the Babri Masjid on Ambedkar's death anniversary 6 December 1992. The party's war-mongering and

destructive nuclear tests were conducted when the Buddha smiled.

Whether it was in 1974 or on 11 May 1998, the Buddha did not smile,

but shed tears, because the Buddha never believed that international

conflicts could be resolved by violence. When Ajatashatru attempted

to attack the neighbouring Vajjian tribal republic, the Buddha said

that so long as it practised democratic principles, the Vajjian republic

should not be attacked and must be allowed to prosper. The Buddha

constantly opposed Bimbisara's hegemonic wars. His theory of

peaceful coexistence, which later became one of the cardinal principles (*panchsheel*) of our non-alignment policy, was based on his praxis of resolving conflicts between different states peacefully.

The Buddhist notion of peaceful coexistence bore fruit in nations like India, Sri Lanka, Burma and China after Ashoka became a Buddhist. Buddhism as a religion spread to all the above mentioned

countries during Ashoka's period, because Ashoka's theory of appealing to soul and mind as against the Vedic theory of aggression and war influenced millions of non-Indians. It was the Buddhist notion of

peace and progress that converted several countries to Buddhism.

The Hindu imagination and diplomacy has several limitations as it has tremendous inward-looking tendencies. Historically, the

Hindutva forces have a tendency to depend on physical might, and

Buddhism opposed that approach. The BJP, within a short time after

coming to power, began to present muscle-power diplomacy as the

only way out among nations. Nuclear weaponization of the state, in

such a short period after it came to power, was rooted in that historical muscle-power psyche. Even in the past, the Hindu school could not spread its religion across borders and could not save the country

from aggression. The BJP thought that the Kashmir problem could

be resolved by nuclear weaponization. The result was that Pakistan

produced more nuclear weapons than India did. The government

then disturbed relations with China, which were limping back to normal, due to George Fernandes's declaration that China is India's Enemy No. 1. He was the proverbial bull in a China shop, but only

the Chinese know best how to stop a loose bull. They supplied to

Pakistan all that India could produce. The Chinese are very cold

(Buddhist) Marxists, and they handle their enemies with all-round

preparation.

What the BJP does not understand is that spending national resources on

producing bombs sucks the vitals of a national economy much more than a conventional war does. A defeat in a conventional

war is far less harmful than the making of nuclear bombs. The collapse of the Soviet economy was more because of investments in weapon making, than the actual waging of wars with China in the face

of the post-Stalinist rift. Now that India and Pakistan have entered

into a nuclear race, both the countries face an economic collapse in

the future.

The race for making nuclear weapons itself is self-destructive, leave alone actually fighting a nuclear war. Only the United States,

which had enormous natural resources, and also rose quickly as an

imperialist country, could afford to invest in nuclear weapons without much difficulty; all other countries paid an enormous cost for making them. Many development projects had to be abandoned because of the weaponization project. This very nature of anti-development was correctly understood by Japan. In spite of being the lone victim of nuclear weapons, Japan built itself a fortress of economic

defence rather than a weapons fortress. In spite of suffering the

nuclear holocaust, it proved that it could rise to be a nation of tremendous economic power. Even the BJP leaders and their coalition partners know this. Why did they then opt for making nuclear bombs?

The BJP, in particular, and the Hindutva forces, in general, have always believed that all contradictions could be resolved only through weapons.

The BJP and Shiv Sena forces use the

trishul as a symbol of threat to the other—to Muslims, Christians, Buddhists, Secularists, and so

on, within the country. They have produced nuclear bombs to

threaten their neighbours—Pakistan and China. Since China and Pakistan have joined hands and have more nuclear bombs, the Hindutva forces can only think of producing more, but the option left

for the country is positive diplomacy based on panchsheel. The

Bharatiya Janata Party cannot do this; the non-Hindutva Indians—the

plural forces—should initiate the process. Right now, it can only start

with people-to-people relationships.

Deccan Chronicle, 1 October 1999

14

Spiritual Fascism and Civil Society

Whenever I raise the question of the socio-cultural negation of the Hindu religion, there are many who take serious objection to such a

discourse. Do they think that there is absolutely no need to reform

that religion? If they think that reform is not required, how do they

intend to run this hierarchy-ridden system, which suffers from inequalities, poverty and a taste for destruction? If they think that reform is necessary, what sort of reform do they think is possible? The Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (RSS) and its allied organizations

have been trying to unite the so-called Hindus without saying a word

about the caste system. Some Hindu thinkers blamed caste on the

Britishers. They claimed that the British policy of ‘divide and rule’

created castes in this country. Some thinkers go to the extent of saying that the Britishers were responsible for every social divide including caste and communal politics. Many of these are from Hindu orthodox and fundamentalists groups. They are out to do enormous

damage to the Indian nation. Needless to say, most of these theoreticians are Brahmins. This method of constructing history is a conspiracy against DalitBahujans. The Brahmins succeeded in their aim because most DalitBahujans were denied education. The Brahmins

invoked religion to keep them illiterate, and were extremely unhappy when the British made education available to them. As a consequence, the educated among the Sudras, including those who work within the Sangh Parivar, were led to think that they would get equal

rights within the present Hindu framework. But they were mistaken.

Those who have been defending the present structure of Hindu civil society have a responsibility to take on the challenge. Can they

spell out their programme of reform? Do they believe in abolition of

caste or not? In the process of moving towards abolition of caste, is it

not essential to work towards the equalization of the social status of

castes? Will the Madigas, Malas, Mangalis, Chakalis enjoy the same

social status as Brahmins? How does the RSS and the BJP intend to

bring about equal status among all castes? What are the specific

programmes? Do the people of this country have a right to know the

mind of the ruling party and its allies or not? With religious, political, and social power in their hands, can’t they initiate reform? If they

cannot, why do they talk about Hindu unity?

The famous Brahmin historian D. D. Kosambi said that it was at the instance of Kautilya that Brahmins were delegated the task of

dividing tribals into castes and in the process subduing the Sudras

and Chandalas. At that point in history, the only social forces that

were challenging the Kautilyan state were the tribals. The Brahmins

used two instruments; the karma theory and *dandaniti* (punishment) to thwart any revolt. Further, their division into castes was an ancient

method of Hinduization. Hinduization, thus, was used as a mode to

establish structural divisions. At what stage the Sudras were divided

into several castes is not exactly known. Ever since the divine theory of *varna* was constructed, the socio-political aim of Hindu thinkers has been to divide society into non-unifiable social units which

gradually became castes. Never in Hinduism's history of three millennia were the thinkers who made an attempt to unite them to form a broader positive religion allowed to succeed.

In the twentieth century, the major attempts to unite such divided groups from below were started by Ambedkar and from above by Gandhi. Gandhi, a Vaishya with a non-dwija Jain background, tried

to combine the Jain mode of *ahimsa* with the Christian mode of passive resistance. It is known that Gandhi borrowed the concept of passive resistance from Henry David Thoreau. In other words, for Gandhi Yardhamana Mahavira and Thoreau's Civil Disobedience

were the main ideals. But Gandhi was a clever tactician. Since he had

led the Congress Party that consisted of many Hindu fundamentalist

Brahmins, he was using the Bhagavad Gita and the names of Rama

and Krishna only as a tactical move. Otherwise, how can the concept

of *ahimsa* and Rama, Krishna, and the Gita go together? It was his aim to establish Hindu unity without dismantling the caste system, but

even such an enterprise was not tolerated by the brahminical forces

of India.

Christophe Jaffrelot in his well-researched book *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics* (Penguin-India, 1996), says:

Gandhi was resented by high caste Hindus because he posed a real danger to their social position. His mobilization of the lower strata

of society threatened to alter the basic characteristics of Indian society by making its cultural periphery its centre. Here lay one of the main reasons why Nathuram Godse decided to kill Gandhi.

This Chitpavan Brahmin felt all the more insecure because his socioeconomic status was very precarious whereas Maratha and Gujarati Baniyas were emerging as the new upwardly mobile

groups of Maharashtra. The ***himsavada*** ideology of Brahminism reached its peak with the murder of Gandhi.

Ambedkar saw serious limitations in the Gandhian ideology, while Gandhi, on the other hand, saw a danger to Hindu unity in

Ambedkar's liberative reservation programme. As a result, the Poona

Pact, a compromise, came into being. The Brahmins within the RSS

did not approve the agreement between Gandhi and Ambedkar as

they did not want any emancipation of Dalits to take place. This was

where the Chitpavan Brahmins of Maharashtra planned a way to

eliminate him, and they succeeded. A protagonist of non-violence

was eliminated violently. Ambedkar, on the other hand, proposed a

theory to annihilate caste based on the Buddhist and Rousseau's

theories of liberty, equality and fraternity. He waited till the end of

his life before finally realizing that Hinduism was beyond reform and

embraced Buddhism. This is the historical background of the intolerance

towards social reform in India. In other words, Hindu ideology was rooted in the concept of ‘divide and rule’ and on the

‘hegemonization of the other’. The main reason for the stagnation of

Hinduism is its ‘spiritual fascism’. Not many have realized that spiritual fascism in civil society and political democracy do not go hand in hand for long.

Once spiritual fascism was established by the Brahmin thinkers, neither the 800-year rule of Muslim kings, nor the 200-year rule of

the mighty British empire could break that caste system which was

the main instrument of divide and rule. The roots of the caste system

lie in spiritual fascism which is in turn predicated on the belief: ‘I am

superior to the other.’ The concept of *aham Brahmasmi* in Hinduism is based on the concept of excluvism. It also assigns the role of God

to one’s own self. The Brahmin self declared itself as Godhood and

always stood against the production of food from the soil. That is the

reason why all Hindu heroes proclaim they are Gods. They do not

even consider themselves agents of a God/Goddess. In contrast, all

other religions are based on prophethood.

One does not find humility in Hindu assertions at all. This ideology of human beings declaring themselves to be God has a strong tendency of spiritual fascism. The Hindu exclusivism is constructed

around this spiritual fascism that institutionalizes itself within the

ideological sphere of spiritualism. The SC, ST, OBCs are victims of

this spiritual fascism. One of the main characteristics of spiritual fascism is that in this mode anybody can directly declare himself God.

Spiritual fascism, however, does not give much scope for women to

Spiritual fascism, however, does not give much scope for women to

be equals with men in any sphere.

The caste system killed the basic initiative among people even to embrace others. The terrorization by using brutal violence was so

complete that Hegel said in his famous book *The History of Philosophy* that the Indian masses lost their soul and spirit in this violent division of society. Spiritual elitism ensures that the people cannot form themselves into a nation. A nation is not a political entity, it is

a philosophical, economic, civilizational, cultural and spiritual entity.

Men and women from all walks of life must play an equal role in all

the spheres mentioned above.

The Sangh Parivar, as a brahminical organization, cannot build India as a globally respectable civilized nation because it has no

agenda for human equality within its vision of Hindu unity. How do

their theoreticians think that the Sudras, Chandalas and Adivasis

even now, when they are becoming educated without having the

right to occupy the highest position in the spiritual domain, will keep

quiet and serve the interests of spiritual fascists even in this century

and millennium? The radical reform I have been talking about is to

weed out spiritual fascism that has been institutionalized in our civil

society. Naturally, those who benefited from such spiritual fascism

defend it from various points of view. But the fundamental question

is that those who lost the essence of life need to be liberated from it.

When nation-states began to institutionalize themselves, as Hegel pointed out,

the human being first sought the integration of

the spirit. A civil society which upholds spiritual hierarchization imposes all kinds of restrictions on human development. The Indian state remains totally disintegrated because of the anti-people ideology of Brahminism. Brahminism can deconstruct itself, if it wants a peaceful transformation of Indian society, by integrating itself

with the whole of Sudra, Chandala and Adivasi food, puja and production culture. If Hinduism wants to reconstruct itself, as the teams of Brahmin pundits went into Adivasi territory at the instance of Kautilya to divide them into castes, let them now go to Adivasi, SC and OBC *wadas* to integrate them by eating their food, by sleeping in their houses, by giving up the cultural isolationism

and exclusivism of Brahminism. The protagonists of Hinduism

must accept this challenge.

Deccan Chronicle, 15 February 2003

15

Freedom Unattained

I am five years younger than Independent India. As I said in my book *Why I Am Not a Hindu,* as a first-generation educated OBC, my growth is a part of independent India. I was born, brought up and have

struggled through a viciously hierarchical society. Naturally, I carry

the pain, the anger and prejudice that the Indian system has injected

into me. Yet, I also share the pride and self-respect that independent

India has offered me. But for Independence, I would not have been

what I am today. At the same time, but for the caste-centred and prejudiced consciousness of independent India, all my relatives, the people of my caste and several castes below and above would not

today have had to live a life even more backward than that of the

medieval Western world.

The pride of now having the windows of my mind opened up, as democratic structures have allowed them to open up, exists in

me, in spite of the fact there is resistance to this from the culture

of the castes above that of mine, and the feeling of castes below,

like the former untouchables, that the culture of my caste is a

hurdle to their mobility. The pride of a dark and gloomy past that

is over and the hope that we too can look forward to a bright future

is a historically-grounded pride in many a sense. If I look at the

gamut of changes that have taken place in the globe during these

fifty years and then at the socioeconomic misery that the caste/

class structures of this country have injected into its body-politic, a

kind of historical depression sets in.

When will the DalitBahujans, still bound by illiteracy, put their signatures on Indian history? Not only those who, like me, were born

in the wake of Indian freedom, but also those DalitBahujans who

will not even be ten years old at the time of its golden jubilee celebrations, remain outside the realm of this freedom. The dawn of freedom, the driving out of the colonial masters, was not an occasion

for a wholehearted celebration by DalitBahujans, for the simple reason that power was transferred to the very brahminical forces that had rendered many castes untouchable, even unseeable. The majority of

the Other Backward Classes (OBCs), which constituted the Bahujans,

did not really even know what that freedom was all about. Political,

bureaucratic, industrial and market power were all in essence transferred to the brahminical forces. The nation state that those brahminical forces visualized was a ‘bhadralok’ nation state in which

the DalitBahujans hardly had any space.

Over these 50 years, the

dwija forces (twice-born Brahmins, with

the active support of the neo-Kshatriya forces such as the Reddys,

Kammas, Jats, Marathas, Patels and so on) made calculated attempts

to retain their hegemony in all political formations (Right, Left and

Centrist). They did not allow DalitBahujan voices to speak differently or express their inner selves. The language of dharma or of justice was interpreted in their own interest. The fruits of the post-Independence modern economies of industry and agriculture

were cornered systematically. The process of slowly but surely transferring power from the so-called secular Hindus to the fundamentalist Hindutva forces started in the late 1980s and that made politically conscious DalitBahujans feel that there was no light even at the other end of the tunnel. This situation forced them to hit back and fight for their

rights. This struggle, of course, engendered a new consciousness.

There have, however, been historical landmarks that shook the foundations of the old order. From the point of view of DalitBahujans, 15 August 1947, in one sense is a landmark, as it created a Constitution that ensured more than anything a provision for social

justice and a theoretical basis for the principle of reservation. It was

this reservation in education, in employment and in law-making bodies that generated an organic consciousness and socioeconomic mobility within the DalitBahujan society. This does not mean that the brahminical forces allowed

the provisions of reservation to operate

fairly or freely. They created checks and balances to retain their hegemony despite the system.

The second landmark was 1956 when Dr Ambedkar gave an alternative politico-spiritual vision by reviving the Buddhist ideology and religion. By re-energizing this indigenous, anti-brahminical, proDalit-Bahujan tradition, Ambedkar could create a sense of history, a sense of hope in the future for the DalitBahujans. Their realization

that Buddha, Basava, Savitri Bai, Mahatma Phule, Ambedkar and

Perivar had constructed a philosophy and an ideology to empower

them had significant implications for the Indian transformation.

The third and most important landmark was the 1990 Mandal struggle. The Mandal report and implementation of 27 percent reservation for the OBCs was nothing but an enlargement of Ambedkar's caste-based reservation thesis. What made it a landmark was the antiMandal suicides and the anti-social justice euphoria of the media.

The OBCs, who were to a large extent indifferent to the Ambedkarite ideology, began to take it up after the Mandal movement. At the intellectual level at least, SC, ST and OBC unity began to crystallize, while the fractured social structure remained disunited. The post-Mandal period created a new consciousness and new social relationships began to emerge which have had the potential of transforming society in a positive direction.

Using reservation as an instrument of social change, or as an instrument of a process of Dalitization of socio-political and administrative institutions, took a new turn with women asking for 33 percent reservation in parliament. Now reservation is being seen as an instrument of gender justice also. Though the construction of all women as a 'caste-blind' bloc is being questioned by OBC intellectuals and

political leaders, the fact that the very same upper caste women who

participated in the anti-reservation agitations are now asking for reservation

itself vindicates the notion that reservation is playing a role in social change. Today, Dalitism has made more inroads into the Indian social system than ever before.

The post-Mandal DalitBahujan consciousness is operating at two levels: *(i)* The Dalitization process is deepening in the various civil societal structures. Against the brahminical notion of 'leisure as life',

the Dalitist nation of 'labour as life' is gaining ground. The

Dalitization process is also influencing the food habits of even the

brahminical people. *Meatarianism* (not non-vegetarianism) is acquiring legitimacy more and more. The Dalitist mode of interaction by women with productive labour and with markets and their acceptance of easy divorce from oppressive husbands has gained more respectability. Dalitization, in the long run, may lead Indian society towards an indigenous form of socialism, ***(it)*** As an intermediary phase between the brahminical social order and the Dalitist social

order, a process of Mandalization is also at work. The process of

Mandalization led by the upper layer of the OBCs, who have their

roots in their caste economies and agrarian properties, does not have

the energy to destroy the caste system. It, however, facilitates the

Dalitization process which has the essential potential to 'annihilate

caste' as visualized by Ambedkar.

DalitBahujan consciousness, both in the political formations headed by the Scheduled Caste leaders such as Kanshi Ram and

Mayawati or headed by the OBCs like Sharad Yadav, Laloo Prasad

Yadav or Mulayam Singh Yadav, is passing through a phase of committing political blunders (like joining hands with the BJP or becoming corrupt). It appears that the productive and creative social base of the DalitBahujans will be able to produce organic leaders and intellectuals who can handle socio-political affairs much better in future.

As they are operating in the electoral and democratic spheres, weeding out the corrupt and the opportunistic is not very difficult.

As the upper caste Left keeps pointing out, the DalitBahujan politico-ideological forces have not yet formulated the agenda of

'decasteization' in its entirety nor have they thought about tackling

the globalization process which is affecting them more and more.

On the other hand, they have become conscious that the upper

caste Left has not overcome its brahminical background, hence it

has not developed the potential to liberate the masses from caste/

class exploitation.

This statement speaks volumes of their new-born consciousness.

The SC, ST and OBC organic intellectuals seem to realize that any

system that allows a centralized authority would suppress the DalitBahujans. They seem to be convinced by Ambedkar's argument that only an adult franchise-based democracy, where every individual can

vote and contest, would help them get their share of power. Hence

there is a conscious attempt to form a 'Bahujan Bloc' to transfer

power from the brahminical forces to the DalitBahujans.

The question of gaining power in every sphere of life has become central to DalitBahujan consciousness. Therefore, they have started forming blocs within every political formation and started

suspecting the upper caste leadership across all ideologies. Slogans

like 'the upper castes in the BJP are white snakes in green grass,

whereas the upper castes in the Left parties are green snakes in

green grass' may be prejudiced, but they express a determined thinking.

Interestingly, DalitBahujan women are raising new questions. As Gopal Guru said, 'They are speaking differently' from upper caste feminists. They have the much bigger task of challenging the brahminical and Dalit patriarchies at home and outside as well as the casteist minds of the upper caste women. They will have to fight not only Brahma and Jambavantha (a Dalit God) but also Lakshmi and Saraswati who have denied them the right to property and education. Thus, seen from the point of view of the DalitBahujan women and the illiterate and poverty-ridden masses, freedom remains yet to be attained.

The Hindu, 15 August 1997

PART 4
On Caste

16

The Buffalo's Unholy Milk

What is India? The question has many answers. One definite answer that I can think of is that India is a country of castes. This has definitely made it different from all the other countries in the world. Nations have pluralities based on race, class, religion and gender. India has all of these and additionally castes, which have constructed us as entirely different beings. We may see racial differences; even modes of life are different from caste to caste. If the many religions have brought in differences in belief, the thousands of castes have resulted in differences in taste as well. In each city and village, people live in distinctly different social clusters. Caste has formulated even our concept of beauty differently.

If we are to see Indians as modern social blocs, they live as Adivasis, Dalits, OBCs and upper castes. Globalization is driving the first three blocs into a death trap, and the latter towards a hitech economy. This reality takes us to other questions: Whose India is it? Who constructed India as a modern nation and who controls its essence?

If India is defined as a nation of productive skills—of tilling land, of cutting crops—its holistic (meatarian and vegetarian) food culture, its symbols of civilization such as the pot, wheel, shoe, sculpture and so on—it belongs to the Adivasis, Dalits and OBCs. If India is defined as a nation of books (from the Rig Veda to the Bhagavad Gita to M. S. Golwalkar's *Bunch of Thoughts)*, big temples and theoretical ownership of them—it belongs to the Brahmins. If that definition includes owning of wealth—land as property, gold, bungalows, cars, airplanes, IT institutions, star hospitals, hotels, Parliament and assemblies, judicial structures, media and so on—it belongs to the upper castes. This social division and mode of ownership of the nation, is unlike the one we see in class societies. In class societies, the hope of moving from ownership of skills to ownership of products to ownership of the history of production—the material

wealth of that history, or in other words, capital—is an attainable reality for the oppressed. In a caste society, that hope remains a mirage.

In ancient times, the Adivasis, Chandalas and Sudras had no right to education; and hence no knowledge of a national self. Education was the prerogative of the Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas. Colonial modernity extended the right to education to all. In the postIndependence period, a small section from the oppressed castes have got an opportunity to read and write, and have become conscious of their own otherness. Now, they hear the rhetoric of the Hindutva forces: one nation, one culture, one people. This is intended only to hoodwink them.

When they realize that the nation is made of their labour power and productive skills, the DalitBahujans feel happy. When they realize that the wealth of the nation is actually their sweat and blood and yet does not belong to them, they stand stunned and shocked. What is more, educational institutions do not recognize their historical contribution; their knowledge is not characterized as meritorious. So-called institutions of science never consider their knowledge of productive skills as science. Their names do not figure while patenting these knowledge systems. And they know that this happens because of the caste system.

This is an, age of globalization, about which every intellectual of the country is excited. But when a proposal for discussing the question of caste at a UN forum comes up, every intellectual of India is afraid that it might become a global issue. National sovereignty is suddenly invoked. When opening up the Indian markets for multinationals, when selling public sector undertakings at throwaway prices to global agencies, national sovereignty hides itself in Capital's cupboard. The once-enslaved African Americans, the migrant Asian-Africans in Britain, the upper caste Indian diaspora in Euro-American countries, have all acquired the right to total dignity. Women have got the right to discuss globally the indignities suffered by them within their families. But the Dalits of India have no right to talk about their lost history at international fora and have no right to equal status.

Whom do the present governing forces represent? Yes, democracy has given the ruling castes a right to claim representativeness, but not to appropriate the national essence for posterity. Vajpayee, Advani and Jaswant Singh can simply say that even a discussion on caste depends on their will and pleasure. The situation of the DalitBahujan masses is similar to that of a black and beautiful

situation of the Dalit-Bahujan masses is similar to that of a black and beautiful buffalo that gives more milk—white milk at that—than the cows of India, but has no sacred status in civil society and no legal protection in the Constitution. Such a situation forces us to ask, whose India is it anyway?

Outlook, 20 August 2001

17

Durban, Caste and Indian Democracy

To ascertain public opinion on the question of including caste in the agenda of the United Nations World Conference on Racism being held in Durban, South Africa, a national committee was constituted by the Prime Minister headed by Ranganath Mishra, former Chief Justice of India. The chairmen of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Commission and of the Minorities Commission were its members. The national committee held its hearing in Hyderabad on 4 June. Unfortunately, it was held *in camera* and initially the committee planned to hear only the versions of carefully chosen organizations. But several (about thirty) SC, ST, OBC and women's organizations of Andhra Pradesh sensed this move and forced the committee to hear all opinions, which it did subsequently.

All organizations, except the few chosen ones, told the committee that caste must be allowed to go on the UN agenda. Unfortunately, the officially chosen and invited organizations had no idea about the Durban conference and what it would be all about. Only the organizations that went on their own made informed and forceful presentations. Several mass organizations gave concrete reasons why caste should be included in the Durban conference. Let me sum up some of the arguments.

The conference at Durban is against race, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. The question is whether caste fits into this definition and therefore India should allow caste to be debated at the UN conference. The argument of the Union Government is that the UN should not interfere in our internal affairs, that India has evolved enough tools to handle the caste question, and that the attention of the UN conference should not be diverted from the question of race, about which India is deeply concerned. All these arguments sound hypocritical.

When the issue of race was put on the UN human rights agenda, Britain and

When the issue of race was put on the UN human rights agenda, Britain and America, where racial discrimination was being practised, were permanent members of the UN and had strongly rooted constitutional democracies as their system of rule. Public opinion within these countries was forcing their governments to enact laws and establish mechanisms for handling racism, xenophobia and other forms of intolerance. India at that time argued that racism was too major an issue to be left to the respective countries to evolve tools to handle. Nehruvian intellectuals, who argued for pushing racism onto the UN agenda, based it on their own experience of xenophobic/intolerant treatment by Whites of all Coloured people, including Indians, in the West. This colonial experience of the Indian brahminic elite itself was one of the grounds for asking for the abolition of unequal race relations. The Indian upper caste elite suffered this xenophobic intolerance for about 200 years; at that time the distance between the White rulers and the lower castes was too great and was mediated by too many castes in between to allow the lower castes to comprehensively experience White racism.

Gandhi's experience in South Africa and the argument that Gandhi worked against racism were India's strongest points. It is also true that Nehru and a host of other Indian leaders were strong advocates of the proposition that race must be included on the UN human rights agenda. But except Ambedkar, who had had the double experience of caste xenophobic intolerance at home and racial intolerance abroad, all the other Indian leaders who experienced racial discrimination and were angry about it were upper caste men and women.

They never realized that similar, in fact more horrendous, intolerance was practised in India in the name of caste. They never thought that the pain they suffered was much less than the pain the Indian lower castes suffered. Caste oppression continued for thousands of years. The Indian upper caste elite who suffered racism abroad had a liberative channel from that treatment when they came back home, but for the lower castes there was no such liberation at all. It was/is a long-drawn-out suffering without much hope. Even now the Union Government wants an undiluted debate on racism because many Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) are suffering racism in many Euro-American countries. Alt NRIs have painful stories to narrate to their parents back home; many of them are even politicians or bureaucrats in the present ruling dispensation. Is it not true that the vast majority of NRIs are from the tipper castes? Do they have the patience to listen to the Dalit narratives of pain back homer What is wrong if such Dalit narratives of suffering are talked about in all fora, national and international? When the upper castes feel relieved of some pain by merely talking about it,

should they not concede that much to the Dalits also in all fora?

Is it not ironical that the sufferings of the Indian upper castes abroad are taken as sociologically real and the sustained suffering of the indigenous people from caste, comparable to that of the Blacks, does not become a sociological reality. Even if such a thing is acknowledged, they do not want it exposed. When victims of racism want to draw international attention and seek aid and help, why can the voiceless not seek the attention, aid and help of the world community? Taking the caste issue to UN fora is not only for the sake of debate. It would draw the attention of the world community so that more aid might flow in for taking up educational and empowerment programmes. Such programmes will go a long way in our development. Instead of taking a loan even for causes such as primary education for millions of lower caste children, why not ask for charity for primary education by talking about the historical magnitude of the caste problem?

What will happen to the prestige of our democracy among the comity of nations if we talk about caste, is another question that all our ultra-nationalist theoreticians ask. By their allowing the race question to be raised, did the prestige of Britain and America suffer in any way? By allowing racism to be debated and measures worked out while being permanent members of the UN, their democratic credentials have been strengthened. The exercise helped the White communities examine their own selves in the context of the international critiques and gave confidence to the Blacks, who began to respect their democracy more.

The Third World countries that asked for a debate on race only shared the moral agony of the Blacks, whereas in the case of caste and the kind of atrocities, ignorance and poverty the lower castes suffer, the capitalist West owes a moral responsibility to uplift them as much as the upper castes of India do. The colonial world benefited from the cheap labour of the Adivasis, Dalits and OBCs. If the Union Government does not even concede the existence of caste how can these communities, in the context of globalization, raise globally relevant questions of compensation? The White rulers of Britain and America could have easily vetoed any proposal on race. But that would have resulted in their democratic credentials becoming suspect among the comity of nations. More important, the victims of racism would have lost confidence in their own governments. But by conceding the truth of racism they gained on all fronts. Their democracies are surviving without facing any major threat.

If the Government of India conducts public hearings such as the one held in Hyderabad and uses them as an eyewash, the international community will laugh at our hypocrisy. The masses who are victims of the caste system will lose confidence in Indian democracy. It is known that at all levels of government the upper castes hold positions of decision-making. The representatives of the victim communities who get an opportunity to sit on such committees may be made to endorse the decisions. How does that convince the educated among the victims, particularly when the government is backed by organizations such as the VHP and the RSS, which continually argue that abolition of caste is detrimental to the Indian tradition of *vamadhdrma*? The day the Dalits lose faith in Indian democracy because they cannot speak of their agony, it will begin to crack.

The Hindu, 11 June 2001

18

Secularism: The Predicament of OBCs

The Prime Minister, in his musings from Goa, played a trick with secularism and his comrade Ashok Singhal put it in the air as he said that the VHP's next target was secularism. Most of the DalitBahujans also have their own ambiguities with the notion of secularism in the form that it operates in India. Many do not seem to understand what it is and do not know how to relate to it. While there is clarity about Hindutva and its negative impact on the DalitBahujans, a serious debate about secularism in relation to anti-caste movements has to take place.

Secularism as a notion emerged out of the writings of Machiavelli and others who followed him. In Machiavellian discourses it connoted a meaning that politics must be separated from religion. In Machiavelli's time Italy was a nation of one religion—Christianity— hence his main problem was how to separate the then all-pervasive religion from politics. Even to achieve that goal he suggests that the political realm must adopt methods of both the 'lion' and the 'fox'. In Britain even after the emergence of a mature democracy, for a long time a total separation of politics from religion did not take place. Places of worship existed in and around the houses of Parliament and parliamentarians decided the course of their politics in them, only implementing their decisions through parliamentary means. However, the notion of secularism pushed the political realm towards independence as religion's control over the political system was reduced. A systematic discourse on secularism gradually led to the separation of

reduced. A systematic discourse on secularism gradually led to the separation of religious from political authority, then to a subordination of the religious authority to the political one. In that situation secularism made sense to people who were both inside religion and outside it.

In several countries where civil society was becoming multi-religious the secular state acted as a neutral and balancing agent and concentrated on promoting economic development. Thus, clear-cut classes emerged and class conflicts led to class wars. In many countries these class wars took the shape of civil wars as well. The resolution of these conflicts eventually led to social equality and economic development in those countries, though initially there was bloodshed, prejudice and bad feeling. Secularism could negotiate with multi-religious class societies which were otherwise fairly uncomplicated, but the question is, does it have the necessary understanding to negotiate with a caste-centred multi-religious society like India? India is not only a country of several religions but also of mutually exclusive castes as well.

The concept of secularism in the European sense separates religion from politics but does not ask for a separation of caste from politics simply because European secularism did not encounter caste at all. The Nehruvian secularism that became the model in India did not separate caste from politics, and consequently while being secular in religious terms, one could quite comfortably remain brahminic ail through the Nehruvian era. More significant was that the state could be rendered brahminic in the name of secularism. This paradigm has not shifted even subsequently.

The Left had adopted secularism as an unavoidable ideal in the Indian context without altering its received European definition in any sense. Ambedkar, however, tried to read the direction which secularism was likely to take in India. He seemed to have thought that one could not be an upper caste Hindu and pretend to be secular at the same time. One could not practise untouchability and claim to be a secularist. For Hinduism is not a spiritually democratic religion like Buddhism, Christianity and Islam. Hinduism is in essence communalism operating through the invisible hand of caste. Those who have been suffering at its hands know that casteism is the worst form of communalism. In that sense secularism in India always remained a cover for the caste operations of the Indian brahminical elite. Because Ambedkar de-essentialized secularism the Dalits chose Buddhism and Christianity as instruments both of spiritual liberation and of political empowerment. As of now the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) have no idea how to engage with the project of secularism. Neither the

Congress nor the communist parties have been able to evolve as caste-free secular political platforms. Secularism thus is not a decasteizing agency, but rather operates as a protective cover for the ‘casteocracy’ of Brahminism. The DalitBahujans do not know how to handle the casteocratic politics that have sustained the hegemony of Brahminism under the guise of secularism.

The only weapon that the DalitBahujans have at their disposal is caste that is turned into a fighting category. When they began to use this as an instrument of social and political empowerment the secular theoreticians quite strangely blamed the victims themselves. They did not see caste in their own ‘enclosed secularism’ but when the victims of caste sought to use caste as Marxian workers used class out of their self-realization, as happened in the case of European workers, they were heckled, cajoled and construed as uncivilized.

There is this talk of secularism being the only alternative for the present morass of the Indian polity. But what does that mean to the OBCs who want some space in all national structures? During the whole phase of the secular Nehruvian polity, the OBCs were not allowed to grow in any structure. The Dalits acquired some space in that secular polity because they challenged Hindu religion and began to construct themselves as a religious minority at the same time as they began to move into Buddhism and Christianity. The secular parties are entering into a crisis with Hindutva recruiting more and more OBCs, first as muscle men and later as minor partners of state power.

Secularism recognizes communities that are organized into religious communities but it does not recognise caste communities like the OBCs who neither have spiritually integrated space in Hinduism, nor have a historical vision of constructing their own religion that can negotiate a space for themselves in the secularist polity. They had some hopes of the reservation agenda but they were punctured by economic globalization and Hinduization of the polity. The Mandal agenda was subverted by both secularists and communalists as both groups saw the danger of the upper castes being replaced from all spheres of hegemony.

The brahminic castes that were controlling the political economy of the nation were willing to accommodate the Dalits in certain spheres but they were not willing to accommodate the OBCs as that would take the casteocracy to its logical end. Before the OBCs started asking for a share in the national cake, the national cake was shared by the *dwija* castes like Brahmins and Banias and some

Sudra upper castes. If the OBCs that constitute a vast majority of the population join that casteocracy, brahminic hegemony slowly but surely gets sidelined. In the Congress, except Sonia Gandhi, who does not have her own caste roots, the old guard is conditioned by upper caste feudalism. Sonia Gandhi does not seem to have the necessary conviction and strategy to set aside the upper caste feudals and fill the party with an OBC, SC and ST leadership which would have given a new meaning to its secularism in the face of the rise of Hindutva.

The communist leaders are suffering from their caste baggage and cannot think of a caste-secular party in the near future. They have not shown any initiative in decasteizing the party. The communist parties' growth in India has been casteocratic and the OBCs do not seem to look up to them. This is a tragedy in itself but upper caste communist leaders seem to be willing to celebrate this political tragedy indefinitely.

Secularism in itself is not an alternative to a stagnant caste society, even one that is showing symptoms of social awareness and asking for sociopolitical and spiritual equality. When communalism is offering its own mode of anti-Islamic and anti-Christian social engineering by deploying OBCs as muscle power, secularism cannot appear as an alternative to these forces. The upper castes within the secular camp occasionally talk about social justice as the integrative process of secularism. Let us not forget the fact that social justice is a concept that has emerged in the European context in order to address gender, environmental and ecological questions. Social justice does not resolve the historical question of caste. For this a major critique of Hinduism, not just Hindutva, has to take place. The upper caste intellectuals in the Congress and communist parties are not willing to do that.

The theoretical position of secularists, namely, the Sangh Parivar that is guilty of equating Hinduism with Hindutva, is begging the question. The DalitBahujans expect a radical position on annihilation of caste and they want real results in real life. Unfortunately there is no communist critique of Hinduism and the religious ideologies that have emerged in India. In a country like India atheism does not work as a widely applicable social position. A serious debate on spiritual democracy and spiritual fascism as they are operating in the world in general and India in particular must take place. Otherwise there exists the danger not merely of Gujarat being replicated everywhere but of a full-scale religious civil war gripping the country.

Deccan Herald, 11 January 2003

19

Caste and Women's Sexuality

Caste has added to the complexity of the Indian social system. Women who suffer from inequality in every society also face more complex problems and abnormal atrocities when their society is hierarchically divided. Atrocities on women are common phenomena in all societies today as they are part of the patriarchal scheme of gender relations, and in addition, caste atrocities mutilate the physical and mental faculties of women in a far more brutal way. In institutions like *sati* and widowhood we find patriarchal power and caste domination inextricably intertwined. Let us not forget the fact that sati and widowhood, if not child marriage, were upper caste (Brahmin, Kshatriya, and in rare cases, Vaishya) practices.

For a variety of reasons, women in upper caste (*Grihya Sutra*bound) families suffered more inequalities and more subtle forms of suppression than the women of working class/castes suffered at the hands of their own men. This is not to claim that working class/caste women do not suffer; wife-beating, for example, might be more prevalent among working class/castes than upper class/castes but the difference is that the working class/caste women have an outlet. As those of us born and bred in working class/castes know for sure, the fields where they work form a forum where they can share their experiences and form peer groups that give scope for venting their anger and criticizing the atrocities of the men of the family. But the position of upper caste women is different. Their distance from work in the fields or in any public space and confinement to the house isolates and stifles them, though economically their lifestyles are far richer than those of the working class/caste women.

We shall examine the problems that Dalit, lower caste and upper caste women face in a sociopolitical situation where anti-caste struggles by the Dalit masses and casteist and hegemonic reactions of the upper castes to these struggles are on the increase. The Chundur incident of Andhra Pradesh where eight Dalits have been butchered by the Reddy landlords and the police, and three more, suspected to have been killed in the same carnage, are still missing; and the Chelkurthi incident where Muthamma, a backward class woman, was stripped and paraded naked, again by Reddys, provide a context to look at this question both from the

naked, again by Reddys, provide a context to look at this question both from the theoretical and practical points of view.

The patriarchal and male chauvinist cultures of the upper castes find expression in a strange manner during such caste carnages. In the case of the Chundur carnage, as in the case of Karamchedu in 1985, the justification of the carnage was quickly managed by floating rumours that the Dalit men at Chundur attacked, humiliated or raped upper caste women. It is significant that the news that broke 48 hours after the carnage took place, on 9 August, mentioned that one of the main reasons for the brutal killings was the humiliation meted out to upper caste women by Dalit men. But no newspaper published specific cases of such incidents or investigated any of them later on. No report, including the pamphlet printed by the Bharatiya Mahila Seva Samiti (an upper caste women's outfit), mentioned names of the men and women involved in such incidents. And yet it is now widely believed, especially among the upper castes, that this was the reason for the butchering of eight persons who were then packed into gunny bags and thrown into the Tungabhadra drainage canal. This reason was repeatedly mentioned without citing a single woman victim's name from the upper castes. Why were the names of upper caste women who had been humiliated by Dalits not mentioned?

One possible reason for this is that there were no such names to cite, and the whole thing was a fabrication to explain away the killings. However, we cannot be certain that there were in fact no incidents that caused tension between the upper castes and Dalits involving man-woman relationships, sexual or otherwise. It is possible that Dalit men may have 'teased' upper caste women. It is possible, in the context of the social changes that were taking place in the coastal districts, that Dalit men may have spoken to upper caste girls or women and began to make friends with them. Perhaps they even made attempts to marry upper caste women. These are possibilities. In a caste culture such incidents invoke the anger of the upper castes more than, let us say, the murder of an upper caste man by Dalits. Yet, neither men nor women of the upper castes dare to specify the incidents by revealing the names of the upper caste women involved. This is because the upper caste women's sexuality is seen as something that is so sacred and so bound up with the honour of the patriarchal family that once the involvement is disclosed the upper caste men will not think of living with such women (if they are married) and if such women are not yet married, it is next to impossible to get them married to men of the same caste. Regardless of whether the involvement was with her own consent or forced upon her, for the upper caste woman it is impossible to live in her family after such an involvement is

discovered and made public.

The attacks against Dalits are being exposed, but many coldblooded murders of upper caste women who were suspected of having developed sexual relations with Dalit men are not even leaked out to the neighbours because the murder takes place within the ‘private domain’ of the ‘sacred family’.

The murders, if known, are justified by community members because in their view caste hegemony and women’s sexuality are very closely linked and hence a woman who involves herself in such an inter-caste relationship is responsible for destabilizing caste hegemony and should be punished with obliteration. In a casteist social structure, one of the symbols of upper caste hegemony is control over women’s sexuality. This is one of the reasons why the rumours of upper caste women humiliated by Chundur Dalit men quickly mobilized support for the Reddy murders. Cutting across caste differences, the upper castes of the area not only supported the murderers, but formed an upper caste outfit called ‘Sarvajanabhyuday Samithi’ to defend the brutality.

Several other examples of such murders of Dalit men by upper castes indicate the entanglement of caste and the control over the sexuality of upper caste women. The infamous incident of the burning alive of Koteshu, a Dalit Jeeta, twenty years ago by the upper caste landlords of Kanchikacherla of Krishna district is generally mentioned as one of the first incidents in a history of brazen atrocities on the Dalits in Andhra. The lynching was justified because Koteshu was said to have ‘developed sexual relations’ with an upper caste landlady. In other words, a society not burdened by caste would merely say that the landlady and Koteshu loved each other. But the caste culture expects that love and affection on the part of upper caste women should be confined only within the parameters of caste. This principle, however, does not apply to upper caste men. They can engage themselves in sexual intercourse with lower caste women, with or without their consent. On the contrary, even an ordinary conversation between upper caste women and lower caste men, particularly with Dalit men, is seen as a crime. If any such thing takes place, the consequences are bound to be serious. The first thing that will happen is that the man involved will be killed. In the 1960s, Koteshu was burnt alive precisely for this reason. As late as March 1990, yet another Dalit Jeeta, Arlappa by name, was killed by the landlords of the same village as he was said to have developed a close friendship with the daughter-in-law of a landlord; in June 1990 at Kothaplavandlapalli of Ananthapur district, a Dalit farm servant was burnt alive by the landlords on the same pretext.

The Chelkurthi incident is yet another milestone in a history of upper caste decadent culture. This took place exactly eight days after the Chundur carnage. If Chundur reflected the Reddy arrogance of Guntur district, Chelkurthi reflected the Reddy decadence of Nalgonda. At Chelkurthi, a Reddy woman, Jayamma, and a Golla (backward caste) boy, Govindu, were said to have been carrying on a relationship for almost five years. As Jayamma's brother, Narayana Reddy, was blackmailing her, on 4 August both Jayamma and Govindu eloped and it was suspected that Muthamma, another Golla woman, had helped them. Narayana Reddy (who is not a rich person at all) along with two others—Parvatha Reddy and Venkatarami Reddy—disrobed Muthamma, inserted chilli powder and a stick into her vaginal tract, and paraded her naked in the village for more than three hours. A month later, in mid-September, Muthamma had still not recovered from the vaginal infection and wounds thus caused. Of course, the Chelkurthi incident along with the Chundur carnage rocked the entire state and Parvatha Reddy was later killed.

This incident brings to light the fact that apart from the brazenness with which the upper caste can strike terror among the SCs and the OBCs the 'misplaced' sexuality of women must attract punishment, if not of the woman herself, then of a substitute, preferably one who combines the hated gender and caste. If a Reddy woman loves a backward caste boy, the relatives of the boy have to face the consequences as Muthamma did. The harassment and rape of lower caste women by upper caste men is a common occurrence and even has social sanction. The double standard is glaring: by the logic of Chelkurthi, the Dalit men of Chundur should have been left unpunished even had they been guilty, while by the logic of Chundur the woman's family should have suffered, not the boy's. The caste culture believes that it should be so.

I am not suggesting even for a minute that upper caste women are not made to suffer horribly for relationships they might develop with lower caste men. In such an event, if caught they are tortured within the four walls of their home. They are confined to the household, labelled insane, tortured mentally and physically. In some cases they might even be killed. As we have just discussed, the news of such killings will not be leaked out and even if it is, such actions, including murders, have the approval of the upper caste community. Even the parents of such women suffer silently out of guilt because they believe that entering into relations with lower caste men, particularly untouchables, is enough reason to be killed or tortured for the rest of their lives. What is more, since everything is hushed up, there is no way to confirm or bring to light the misery of such women. At least [illegible] Kotcherlakota was burnt alive, Ardanna

misery of such women. At least we know how Koteshu was burnt alive, Ariappa was killed, buried in the landlord's fields and how Muthamma was tortured, but we do not know what happened to those upper caste women who developed relations with backward caste men willingly.

The much publicized Chundur Dalit 'misbehaviour' with upper caste women was another stunt. Chundur is one of the best examples of growing anti-caste consciousness among Dalit masses. The Dalit youth in Chundur were fighting on many fronts against untouchability. They attempted to instal a statue of Ambedkar in the midst of the village, despite upper caste opposition; they insisted on sitting amidst upper caste people on festive occasions (or whenever there were street dramas) and on some occasions they succeeded. For example, they succeeded in installing Ambedkar's statue, they succeeded in sitting amidst upper caste folks at a street drama staged on Dussehra day in 1990. It is also possible that they were trying to interact with upper caste women or girls. There were more educated youth in the Dalitwada than in upper caste wadas (there are more graduates and postgraduates among Dalits than among upper castes at Chundur). In such a situation, college-going Dalit boys naturally began to interact with upper caste girls on the train and bus journey from Chundur to Tenali (Tenali is 20 kilometres away from Chundur and for college education the students travel that, distance every day). Many Dalits would attempt to strike up friendships with upper caste women and finally convert that friendship into marriage as a way of upgrading their status in the caste hierarchy. In rare cases, especially if the parents of the girl are poor and the boy is well educated and willing to marry the girl, the parents are willing to accept such marriages as this gets them out of the enormous burden of the dowry trap.

The parents of many Kamma women have allowed their daughters to marry Dalit men (in this regard the Reddys of Andhra are more conservative). But by and large the opposition to such inter-caste marriages comes from the rich upper castes because they see this process as an affront to their caste cultural hegemony. At Chundur every such inter-caste interaction between Dalit men and upper caste women is sought to be projected as sexual harassment or misbehaviour of Dalits towards upper caste women regardless of questions of actual consent and in no single incident do they pinpoint anyone in particular because the upper caste girls who form alliances with Dalits will have to face social censure if their names are revealed. The village upper caste elite will not keep quiet if they decide to marry Dalits because the flow of upper caste girls into Scheduled and backward caste families through marriage would create a crisis in the dowry economy of the upper castes (in Andhra Pradesh the biggest

dowry market exists among the Kanimas, Reddys and Vellamas).

The dowry economy survives as a strong institution only when the marriage system operates within the restricted boundaries of caste. Once the gates are opened by decasteizing the sexuality of women the monopoly of the upper caste rich, which survives through exchange of capital within a limited number of families, suffers a setback. If caste and the caste-based marriage system loosen their grip over the sexuality of women it not only puts an end to caste hegemony but also to exploitative economic relations. A Dalit in the village is not only seen as an untouchable or a backward caste person as lower caste but in market relations the upper castes are seen as givers and the backward and Scheduled Castes as takers; the upper caste as supervisors and the lower caste working masses as the supervised and exploited (this does not mean that there are no Reddy, Vellama and Kamma labourers but they are few in number. Of course, one hardly comes across a Brahmin labourer).

Market relations and social relations are closely interlinked. One maintains the other and if one changes, the other also begins to change. It is here that caste becomes a base as well as a superstructure. In a society of caste hierarchy (in this hierarchy, as Ambedkar rightly pointed out, ascending respect and decending disrespect and inequality survives) and gender inequality (even among women, status and respectability is based on their caste) women's sexuality not only gets commoditized but the value of this commodity changes on the basis of their caste. Of course, the rate of male sexuality in the dowry market also increases or decreases with caste. Given equal qualifications, the rate of dowry depends on whether one belongs to the Kamma, Reddy or Vellama castes. The lower the caste one belongs to, the lower the dowry one gets. The punishments meted out to male members who interact with upper caste women also depend on their caste. Thus, if upper caste women are humiliated by lower caste men, caste justice demands capital punishment for such an act whereas if lower caste women are humiliated by upper caste men it is not regarded as a crime at all.

The irony of the situation comes out quite clearly if we examine the upper caste male attitude towards lower caste women. Lower caste women normally go to work in the fields of upper caste landlords. By and large, the attitude of the landlord is that whatever wage he is paying for the day's labour should be regarded as inclusive of his control over her body. He is not only entitled to abuse and humiliate her, he assumes that she should submit to his overtures. His economic and social power, in addition to his superior caste, often forces the

lower caste woman to surrender herself, whether she likes it or not. In rare cases such upper caste landlords are attacked or killed by lower caste people, but even if they kill these upper caste rapists the upper caste rich have the strength to stage retaliatory attacks on the lower castes, especially the women and the children. They can also make the judiciary convict the men, justly or not. Upper caste men, as a rule, are released or given light sentences if found guilty. Parvatha Reddy, one of the accused in Muthamma's case, had been earlier sentenced to life but was released with the support of a Reddy who held one of the nation's highest offices.

Take, for example, the relationship between upper caste men and untouchable women. Upper caste men refuse to drink the water carried by untouchable women, refuse to eat the food touched by them and if the body of an untouchable woman touches them in public they bathe but, in private, as and when the upper caste men want them sexually, lower caste women have to surrender themselves. In other words, their body is untouchable but their sexuality is not. In the minds of these men, the act of rape is the only contact with lower caste women that does not threaten the men's caste.

In rural Telengana, Dalit women invariably go every morning to clean the cattle sheds of landlords (in Telengana the majority of the landlords happen to be Reddys and Vellamas) and it is usual that the upper caste landlord men rape these women at such times. Even when the women go to the fields they are in danger of being raped. However, not a single incident has come to light where those landlords were killed or punished by people of their own caste or forced to live with and support the Dalit women they had violated. On the contrary, the more such crimes the landlord perpetrates the greater will be his power. The reputation of having 'taken many lower caste and untouchable women' only enhances his social power. The case of Indira, an SC girl near Tanguturu of Prakashani district, illustrates the point more clearly. Indira was a good-looking girl who was employed in a private company. As she was earning a decent salary she was maintaining herself well. A Kamma landlord repeatedly sent feelers asking her to surrender to him sexually in an illicit relationship but not to marry him legally. Indira spurned the offer. One day the landlord managed to catch hold of Indira, raped her and brutally killed her. Her naked corpse lay on the main road of the village for more than 24 hours. Neither the administration nor the upper castes bothered to remove the body nor to send a message to her relatives. The landlord was neither killed nor socially boycotted nor did the police arrest him. Even today, after two years (the incident occurred in 1989) the culprit roams scot-free.

culprit rulers set free.

The attitude of the state is no better. At Chundur, for example, the Superintendent of Police of Guntur District justified the murders of Dalits by accusing them of misbehaviour with upper caste women. He justified the police firing that took place on 10 September wherein Anil Kumar, the main witness of the 6 August carnage, was killed, by stating that the Dalit women stuck pins into the chests of policemen and grabbed their private parts. Would the Superintendent of Police survive even for a day, if he indulged in this kind of talk against upper caste women? The superintendent, R. P. Meena, was a tribal himself yet he did not hesitate to describe the Scheduled Caste women as sexually aggressive and perverse.

At Chelkurthi, the police at first refused to register the case, in spite of the fact that Muthamma went to the police station and demanded that they do so. The murderer of Indira was never arrested. On the contrary, the police actively aided and abetted the brutal killing of innocent Dalits at Chundur. This anti-women and anti-Dalit bias of the state makes its position more complex and more dubious. Consequently, it is imperative that anti-caste organizations and women's movements should make more concerted efforts to fight the gender and caste-based political system of the Indian state and society on many fronts.

Mainstream, 23 May 1992

20

Caste Shadows in London

Last year, I attended a conference on 'Dalits and Development' organized by the Voice of Dalits International, an organization started by a British woman, Irene Culas, who is married to an Indian fisherman from Kerala, Eugene Culas. I knew London had a large population of Dalits who had migrated over a period of several years. They are organized around Ravidasi Gurudwaras, and worship Ambedkar as their second guru after Guru Ravidas. The Dalits in London are of the opinion that Indians have recreated the caste system even in London, and the pattern is slowly extending to America.

At Westminister House to deliver a talk, I met the Rev. David Haslam, a minister at Westminister Abbey and the author of a famous book, *Caste Out*, who had organized the talk. David Haslam toured the whole of India for a year to write that book. It was an exciting moment in my life, as I was sharing the platform with a famous Labour MP, Jeremy Corbyn. The Labour movement in Britain produced many great thinkers as well as sociopolitical and economic reformers. Labour leaders played great roles in working out solutions to inequalities in the world. Jeremy Corbyn is one such great Labour leader. Though he is a middle-aged man, he looks young and energetic.

As a student of British constitutional history, I had nurtured a cherished notion of the British Parliament and the constitutional history that it has spawned. The British Parliament functioned for centuries at Westminster House. I read and re-read about it. I saw its photographs time and again, as this was where the seed of parliamentary democracy grew and the unwritten constitution was codified sentence by sentence. The day I was to deliver the talk, the British Parliament was discussing the 'why' and 'how' of the Iraq war, how Tony Blair, the co-author of the Iraq war 'misled the British Parliament and the nation with cooked-up intelligence about the weapons of mass destruction' in Iraq.

Westminister House is the most imposing building I have ever seen. On first setting my eyes upon it, I felt that my country had also contributed to its grandeur and elegance, as India had, through the colonial exploitative process, given a lot to building the British nation. For me, it was a mixed but nostalgic feeling—that the Westminster House is a symbol of the oldest democracy and at the same time represents a colonial empire. Rosemary, a British social activist who hosted my stay, showed me the Queen's palace, which looks more colonial than democratic. It is quite strange that the Britishers are not yet tired of the Crown and all the pomp that goes with it.

The streets of London breathe capitalism and colonialism. Walking along the neatly maintained London roads, we visited the London School of Economics, about which I had heard much during my student days at the semi-feudal Osmania University. I never regretted not having studied abroad, more so in London, as it was impossible for a student of my background. Had I done so it would have robbed me of my native nature and rural essence.

The subject of my talk was 'Sources of Terrorism and the Caste System'. For everyone in the audience, the topic was unusual. The main point I made was that because of caste, the Indian population was never brought under the umbrella of

because of caste, the Indian population was never brought under the umbrella of one religion. The lower (oppressed) castes of India are a fertile ground for Islam and Christianity to take root, as Hinduism could never take all the castes into its fold in the true spirit of equality.

As Hinduism could never overcome caste hierarchy, the masses looked for other spiritual resources. Room for other religions to enter the scene bred terrorism in India and also in South Asia. Visible Islamic terrorism is being nurtured against a background of invisible Hindu caste terrorism perpetrated on the lower castes. Terrorism is related to the caste system and untouchability, and the failure to bring the Indian masses under the umbrella of a spiritual democratic realm.

In any nation, when competing inequalities are ready to welcome an outside hegemonistic force to come and occupy the sociopolitical space against a hostile backdrop, such forces easily usurp that space. Caste and Brahminism did not allow India to organize its citizens as one cultural people, so better organized social forces could achieve ascendancy through whatever method or weapons they had at hand.

Brahminic Hinduism uses day-to-day terror and the history of Islam in that region shows that in order to beat the terror of casteism, Islam used more terror to attract the victims of caste terror and position itself as a counter-force to casteist Hinduism. We must remember how even a soft Dalit poet like Gurram Joshue was unhappy with Babur for not occupying the whole of the South—for not washing his sword in the Krishna and Cauvery waters.

Islam expanded in the Indian subcontinent because there was a huge lower caste constituency that was willing to embrace Islam if they could be truly freed from brahminical bondage. That is how Islam took away Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh just in the last 300 years and that is why Kashmir is on its way in the same direction.

The West has not understood this historical source of terrorism. If the West wants to get rid of terrorism altogether, it should work for the apoliticization of the caste system in India. At my talk, Jeremy Corbyn stood among the audience, as he had come in late after attending Parliament proceedings. He was to respond to my talk. In Britain, nobody who comes late to any function is offered a chair, even if he or she happens to be an MP or a minister. All people are treated as equal citizens. That day, all the chairs in the room were already occupied by people. They had come from different parts of London. So, Corbyn had to stand

people. They had come from different parts of London. So, Corbyn had to stand and speak. That was a big surprise for me, as we are used to treating our MPs and ministers as feudal lords.

Corbyn appeared to be very knowledgeable about the Indian sociopolitical system. He said, ‘Nobody in the United Kingdom understands that the Indian caste system is a major danger to Indian democracy’ So he took the campaign against caste seriously.

The Dalit Solidarity Network Worldwide had formulated a resolution for tabling for debate in the British Parliament. Several organizations including the Network and Voice of Dalits International took up the task of gathering the signatures of 50 MPs, which is the quorum for tabling a resolution of international importance.

The proposed House motion reads: ‘That this House condemns the continued atrocities against Dalits in South Asia, especially in India; recommends in the light of revelations about the distribution of Gujarat earthquake aid, re-evaluation of development policies, programmes and co-operation agreements and the use of aid on the basis of their effect on Dalit communities; strongly recommends implementation of general recommendations on descent-based discrimination made by the UN Committee for Elimination of Racial Discrimination; and calls upon the House Office to monitor the activities of the right-wing Hindutva organizations operating in the United Kingdom to ensure that they are not promoting caste and descent-based discrimination and the practice of untouchability.’

The proposed motion was first signed by Corbyn and I learnt that in another month, about 30 MPs had signed it. If 20 more MPs signed the motion, it could be tabled and British Parliament would have to discuss it.

If the British Parliament discusses the caste-based discrimination that was sidelined at the Durban UN conference, once again the caste question will come to the centre-stage of world fora. There is a strong view among Western scholars that caste must be made an issue at global fora when the BJP is in power, as all the right-wing forces basically believe that caste practices are spiritually ordained, and the priestly class that upholds *vamadharma* and perpetrates the caste system is working hand in glove with the BJP.

The British Parliament is still the harbinger of democratic discourses. There

were thinkers and politicians who took a stand on the abolition of racial apartheid in the British Parliament and in civil societal discourses. One hopes the same Parliament and civil society will take up the question of abolition of caste in India too.

In the context of cultural globalization all sociopolitical and spiritual issues of all nations need to be considered. Global systems need to take up the question of institutionalizing equality in all spheres of life. The question of gender, racial and caste inequalities and also all forms of ethnic inequality in all spheres of life should become the concern of all nations.

Deccati Chronicle, 3 September 2003

21

Caste in a New Mould

A country of castes is a country of stagnation and underdevelopment. A by-product of the brahminical discourse, the caste system was believed to be a divine institution till the British period, and despite resistance from the DalitBahujan masses (SC, ST, OBCs), the hegemonization of brahminical culture, practice and ritualism has been established through well-designed ideological and political moves. The construction of a purity-and-pollution theory to examine caste relations is part of this ideological design. Based on brahminical texts and ideas, it was the French sociologist Louis Dumont's work, *Homo Hierarchicus*, which first constructed a theory of purity and pollution to explain the logic of the caste system: This theory examined Indian society from above, stating that the brahminical (exploitative) castes constructed their selves as 'pure' and the other (productive) castes as 'polluted'.

M. N. Srinivas adapted this theory to construct his modern sociological theory of 'Sanskritization' in India. He was joined by several other brahminical sociological scholars, who produced volumes of literature to sustain this theory of purity and pollution. It is not an accidental divide that scholars constructing brahminical sociology have used Dumont's theory to come to a conclusion that caste relations, though based on purity and pollution, are not exploitative, while scholars who began to study caste through the Ambedkarite approach have come to exactly the opposite conclusion: that brahminical society is exploitative and the hierarchical caste system is a useful instrument to sustain that exploitative

relationship.

M. N. Srinivas's Sanskritization thesis essentially feeds into the theory of purity and pollution. Apparently modern, it basically aims at maintaining the hegemonic notions of Brahminism. The reactionary character of the Sanskritization theory lies in the fact that it presents brahminical exploitative values as superior and shows that even educated DalitBahujans, living in a hierarchized caste system, endeavour to move into the brahminical fold.

The volume under review, *Caste: Its Twentieth Century Avatar*, is a collection of articles edited by Srinivas. The lengthy introduction itself tries to establish that the purity-pollution theory holds good even for postMandal India, stating 'Since the 1950s, the concepts of purity and impurity have been seen as central to caste'. Nowhere in his introduction does Srinivas discuss the changes in conceptual and methodological realms in India after the Mandal struggles. The attempt in all the essays seems to be to show that there are attitudinal changes here and there, but that notions of purity and pollution continue to dominate Indian caste society.

The choice of Leela Dube to discuss the issue of caste and women in the collection seems to point to a token acknowledgement of the feminist movement in India. Dube, too, does not step out of the purity-pollution framework. It is indeed surprising to see her treat terms like 'upper castes' and 'clean castes' as uncontestable synonyms. Her study ignores that fact that DalitBahujan' women cook meat and fish as part of their festive ritual cooking, and it is considered ritually pure among the women-folk in rural and urban slums to offer the cooked meat to their deities without involving a priest as a go-between. Brahmins and Banias may perceive these rituals as 'Sudra festivals', but their perception does not matter.

What is of significance, is the ongoing Dalitization of Brahmin women. The increasing indifference towards *madi* cooking (cooking with a wet cloth on the body after a bath), increasing divorce rates, the increasing participation of Brahmin and Bania women in semiproductive work and public life and the increase in meat-and fisheating, drinking and smoking are in fact an indication of the Dalitization process in Indian society. This is because all these are— and have been—existing practices among rural DalitBahujan women, and only now are beginning to penetrate the society of Brahmin women. Dube's essay, unfortunately, seems to be restricted to very traditional brahminical families,

projecting them as the representatives of the reality in Indian society.

Panini's essay on 'The Political Economy of Caste' is a misleading piece, with very little mention of political economy. Apart from a brief survey of the caste background of workers and the impact of state policies on caste relations, it does not contribute significantly to our understanding of the productive or non-productive nature of the so-called lower and upper castes. The emerging trends in political economy brought about by DalitBahujan movements are completely ignored by the writer. For example, the Madigas of Andhra Pradesh contribute to the economy by converting "skin from animal carcases into leather and provide leather instruments for both agrarian and household purposes'. The 'Madiga Dandora' movement argues that this contribution constitutes 10 percent of the gross national product, and hence, they deserve a 10 percent share in the national economy. Washerpersons and barbers now claim that they are the source of individual and village cleanliness. The Malas argue that it is they who keep the village clean (pure) while the upper castes pollute the streets, and therefore deserve better wages than a priest, a clerk or even a schoolteacher. The Yadavas claim that since they have been responsible for domesticating cattle whereas the brahminical castes have enjoyed the milk, butter, curd and ghee, it is time the historical debt was paid back. Such arguments are going to reconstruct the entire political economy of India. If we term this new point of view 'DalitBahujan political economy', is it not the responsibility of a social economist like Panini to examine the implications of such developments?

Jayaram's article 'Caste and Hinduism' tries to examine the changing relations of caste in the context of the issues of 'Mandal' and 'Masjid-Mandir'. While attempting to capture the complexities of caste structures, he tries to argue that 'Sanskritization is becoming a pan-Indian phenomenon'. Quoting M. N. Srinivas, Jayaram says that the 'process of modernization has reduced the tempo of Sanskritization and somewhat muted its significance'. But the whole essay refuses to acknowledge the process of the negation of Hindu Brahminism in the recent past. What did the elections of 1993 and 1996 in Uttar Pradesh and the general elections held this year (1996) show? Significantly, even in North India, where there has been no visible tradition of an anti-Brahmin movement, there has emerged a binary opposition to brahminical upper castes among the DalitBahujans. Karnath's piece on caste in contemporary rural India is concerned yet again with purity and impurity, and the attempt to establish, through insignificant examples, that this theory is still operative in Indian society. But the data presented in his own article indicates strong trends towards Dalitization. According to him 'Many of the traditionally vegetarian castes have

Dalitization. According to him 'Many of the traditionally vegetarian castes have now begun to eat non-vegetarian (meatarian) food and consume alcoholic beverages. The number of non-vegetarian restaurants and liquor shops are increasing in the bigger villages and small towns.' Does this not indicate that brahminical vegetarianism is giving way to Dalitist meatarianism?

Of the two articles by Radhakrishnan, one is devoted to a study of the Backward Class movement in Tamil Nadu and the other to a critique of the *Mandal Commission Report (MCR).* The latter has, in fact, been widely publicized in newspapers like *The Hindu.* It attacks the *MCR* not from an ideological angle, but by raising technicalities. Indeed, brahminical social scientists are reacting to the *Report* mainly from two angles: from the point of view of its contents and contradictions, and from the point of view of its impact on society.

No other report or text written in India has had such tremendous impact. Particularly after its implementation in 1990, the *Report* has rocked Indian civil society. Why were the upper castes of India so disturbed by a report which, according to Radhakrishnan, did not have substantive data, was methodologically faulty, theoretically untenable and so on? Brahminical scholarship has not had any methodological or ideological problems with the *Manu Dharma Shastra* or Kautilya's *Arthashastra.* How could Radhakrishnan be convinced by any methodology, when he had made up his mind to oppose any report that decided upon reservations for OBCs? It is indeed difficult to argue with intellectuals who have not perceived even untouchability to be a major problem. A discussion of untouchability inevitably involves Gandhi, but Gandhi himself was a Bania—a caste that suffered humiliation at the hands of Brahmins. Why is it that in the entire nationalist, period only Bania leaders like Gandhi and Lohia showed a certain concern for the caste question? Was it not a fact that the nationalist movement was dominated by Brahmin leaders and not one of them felt seriously about the caste system? Is it not a fact that V. P Singh agreed to implement the *MCR* because he belongs to the Kshatriya caste which has a tradition of anti-Brahminism in history?

The papers by Zarina Bhatty, Tharamangalam and Neera Burra examine caste relations among Muslims, Christians and Buddhists. Summing up these three articles, Srinivas concludes that 'contrary to popular views, ideas of purity and pollution play a part in the lives of Muslims, Christians and Buddhists'. The notion that Srinivas projects here, is that Hinduism has influenced all the other religions in India. Neera Burra, for example, projects a minor example as a proof of the presence of Hinduism among Buddhists. During the course of an

interview with a Buddhist woman, she is offered til gur laddus which, according to her, are ‘traditional Hindu offerings’. Though Tharamangalam argues that ‘caste does exist among Christians but... without any necessary linkage with the theological ideas of purity and pollution’, Srinivas undermines that point and tries to see the existence of notions of purity and pollution among Christians as well.

I do agree with one point made by the contributors in the volume, namely, that caste relations among people are changing. But the question to be asked is, in what direction is this change taking place? The increasing number of sociopolitical agitations in postMandal India indicates that this change is in terms of the Dalitization of society. Movements towards a DalitBahujan identity through empowerment and structural reorganization are on the increase.

While studying the caste system in India, this volume does not adopt an anti-caste methodology, but resorts to a brahminical one. It ends up, therefore, seeing everything that is progressive, as unethical and undesirable. The very title, *Caste: Its Twentieth Century Avatar,* shows a negative and brahminical understanding of postMandal developments. The very empowerment of DalitBahujans is seen in the volume as an unwanted *avatar*. This is the reason why the volume does not critique the postMandal Hindutva fascist and casteist trends. By being silent on postMandal Hindutva, ail the writers in the volume have disclosed their true leanings. They do not want caste to be annihilated as Ambedkar desired, but want caste and the hegemony of Brahminism to survive forever.

Biblio, November 1996

PART 5
On the Right to Religion

22

Hinduism and the Right to Religion

Since Vajpayee called for a debate on the ‘conversions’ of the tribals of Gujarat to Christianity, controversy has raged on the question. At

the same time, Hindutva forces have been occasionally targeting

missionaries in different parts of the country. The visit of Pope John

Paul II and the adoption of the document ‘Ecclesia in Asia’ at the

Asian Papal Conference of the Catholic Church have thrown a challenge to the major religions of Asia: Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam.

One major statement that the document made was: ‘Just [as] in the

first millennium the Cross was planted on the soil of Europe, and in

the second on that of America and Africa, we can pray that in the

third Christian millennium a harvest of faith will be reaped in the

[Asian] continent.’ Let us not forget the fact that behind this hope of

the Church there are many European states whose moral loyalty the

Catholic Church commands. If we see the implications of such a commitment on the part of the European populace to the Church in the context of the emergence of the European Union (where Catholicism

is still the commanding religion) as against the Protestant-dominated

USA, the trend becomes clearer. Very interestingly the ‘Ecclesia in

Asia' document appears to present a homogenized view of Christianity by setting aside the internal conflicts between Catholicism and Protestantism. The recent attacks by Hindutva forces on Indian Christians seem to have helped them to view Christianity as a monolith.

More than in any other nation in Asia, undoubtedly India provides a fertile ground to 'reap the harvest of faith' for the Church because of the contesting social pluralities that have been built into

Indian society by the graded unequal caste system. The Hindu

clergy, despite the assertions of the Hindutva brigade, have never

made it clear whether Hinduism is a religion or a way of life. If the

clergy defines it as a religion it has never shown nor is there any such

evidence forthcoming from their on-going practice that like all other

universal religions it treads the path of inclusiveness. The

exclusionism of the Brahmin clergy is an essential ethical value of

the Hindu mode of life. Leave alone the non-existence of a 'one

God one book' ethic for Hinduism—as that has come to be known as

the core principle of an inclusionist religion—the basic 'right to religion' has not been granted to the Scheduled Tribes, the Scheduled Castes and even to the Sudras who are being characterized as Other

Backward Classes in many parts of the country after the Constitution

recognized such a social category. Apart from the claims of the Hindu

political leaders like Mahatma Gandhi during the freedom struggle

and proclamations of the leaders of the Hindutva forces, there is no

policy statement from the top Hindu clergy declaring that the non*dwijas* are part

of Hinduism. A major chunk of the non-dwija population constitutes the STs, SCs and OBCs.

If we take the top modern interpreters of Hinduism—Gandhi, S. Radhakrishnan and P.V. Kane—only Gandhiji characterized Hinduism as a religion and hence asked for the adoption of inclusionism as its policy and everyday practice because a religion invariably has

got to be inclusivist. Radhakrishnan and Kane defined Hinduism basically as a way of life. Once it is defined as a way of life with the huge divide of civil society into two broad camps called ‘dwijas’ and

‘Sudra-Chandalas’ with distinct cultural markers in food habits,

modes of cooking, worship and so on, which way of life will be characterized as Hindu? Assuming that the dwija way of life is characterized as Hindu, does that not automatically suggest that the non-dwija way of life is outside the framework of Hinduism? In all religions the

priestly class constructs boundaries for the people’s way of life and

the practices that the priests uphold become the central way of life

of the people who belong to that religion. This is where the religion

constructs its own sense of belonging. If Hinduism is a way of life

wherein the boundaries of that way of life are either not defined or

the cultural life process of the people not homogenized with principles of cultural equality, it cannot claim the authority of a religion over the people at all. The rights of such people, who are outside the

cultural boundaries of the priesthood, to embrace any other religion

which provides them the social and cultural advantages of that religion must be respected. Here the concept of ‘conversions’ cannot be invoked. Conversely, if the Brahmin clergy declare that Hinduism is

a religion like any other it is their spiritual duty to grant all the

people the right to become priests and interpret its tenets based on

their life experience.

In this modern democratic phase of Indian society two things become central for the exercise of the right to religion: One, the

right to priesthood and, second, the right to communicate with the

divine in one's own mother tongue. These two are mutually interlinked rights, especially in a society where historically language has been used as an instrument of spiritual suppression. In other words, if

the Brahmin clergy of India declare that the SC, the ST and the OBCs

are Hindus, their right to priesthood and their right to use all nonSanskritic languages as ritually correct instruments of worship must also be recognized. But unfortunately till today there has been tremendous resistance to giving theological training to children coming from all castes and there is more resistance to allowing languages other than Sanskrit for prayer. Resisting the reform of Hinduism and

not allowing the right to embrace any other religion by characterizing such an act as 'conversion' as the Hindutva forces do today amounts to asking the vast majority of the people to remain in 'religious darkness'. This is nothing but religious fascism. It is important to note that Christianity allows the right to priesthood and the right

to use the mother tongue as lingua franca as a matter of spiritual pragmatism. The Christian religion in India granted these basic rights to whoever embraced it, though it could not eradicate the caste system

from within.

Do the Sudras and Chandalas in the classical sense or the SCs, STs and OBCs in the modern sense have the right to chose any religion and embrace it in the absence of a universal declaration by the Hindu clergy? Do the Hindu clergy or the Hindutva forces who do

not talk about reform in Hinduism even as much as the Arya Samaj

or Gandhi did, have the right to ask the people of India not embrace

any other religion? Can the Prime Minister who came from the caste

of the Hindu clergy declare his agenda of reform? Do the dwijas who

practice a life of ‘difference’ have the right to tell the Christian

clergy not to assimilate the SC, ST and OBCs into a universally recognizable religion? The concept of religious conversion is based on the assumption that one is already within a particular religion, which

one decides to leave and adopt a different one by conversion. But

what the tribals in Gujarat or Orissa were doing was embracing Christianity, not converting to it. What right have the dwijas, who see themselves as different, to define the embracing of any religion by

the non-dwijas, who also consider themselves different, as conversion? If dwijahood is rebirth, according to the Hindu religion, as least all SCs, STs and all Sudras should have been given that dwijahood a long time back.

Whether it is the Prime Minister or the organized brigade of the Hindutva Parivar, they have no moral authority to use an inclusivist

language to defend an exclusivist religion. Either they will have to

fight for reforms within Hinduism whereby its present structure completely changes or they will have to allow the masses to look for avenues available outside it. With the mere fact that the state machinery is at their command they cannot bulldoze the ignorant masses to do their will.

The Hindu, 2 December 1999

23

Reject the Oppressor

On 4 November, the Government of India felt tremors for altogether unexpected reasons. Under the leadership of an officer called Ram Raj, the Dalits of India

decided to create history not in the field

of electoral politics but in the sphere of religion—the same principle

on the basis of which the BJP-led government came to power. Ram

Raj decided to become Udit Raj to steal the socio-spiritual agenda

from the brahminical forces of India.

Suddenly, the Hindutva politics that came to the centre-stage of political power with the slogan of *Ram Rajya*, around the name of the Hindu divine ruler Sri Ram (at the social level a name that is very

popular among the Dalits of North India including the Dalit politicians—Jagjivan Ram, Kanshi Ram, Ramvilas Paswan and so on), began to undergo a change. That whole society which was kept untouchable without aspiring for a religious history of their own appeared to move with determination towards Buddha Raj, in the footsteps of their modern Buddha, B. R. Ambedkar.

Why was the Central Government so afraid of a religious meeting, furthermore one led by a government official?
The Delhi police cited two reasons for cancelling the permission

for the (in *their* language, 'conversion') meeting of Dalits embracing Buddhism at the Ramlila grounds. One, that the meeting was being

organized with the help of the All India Christian Council (AICC),

and second, that some organizations like the Vishwa Hindu Parishad

were opposing it and hence they were apprehending trouble. For

these reasons the police not only cancelled the permission, but cordoned off all the main roads that led to Delhi.
Thousands of people were stopped at various entry points. Despite that, according to some estimations, about one lakh Dalits embraced Buddhism on that day and the press splashed the photographs of Dalits getting shaved by Buddhist monks on the *Embrace Buddhism* dais. What a feeling of liberation that atmosphere must have created for Dalits who till now did not have the

opportunity to go

their heads shaved even by the village barbers as part of the

wretched casteism that brahminical ideology,has created! Now they

were being shaved by the monks themselves in the open venue of a

public function.
Let us take up the two arguments that the Delhi police, with a

clear direction from the Union Home Ministry, gave for cancelling

the permission. Assuming that the AICC helped the Dalits to embrace Buddhism in Delhi, what is wrong with that? The Dalits of India have been denied the right to religion for almost three millennia. Except for living in the spiritual realm of their own, which was constructed as a small tradition by characterizing their food culture

of ‘meatarianism’ and ‘beefarianism’ as polluted, they have never

known the experience of being part of a universal religion of which

any educated Dalit can read in any book about religion.
In Indian history the educated Dalits read about Hinduism. In

world history they read about Christianity, Islam and Buddhism. But

they were not part of any of them in any meaningful way. Though

they are being claimed as Hindus mostly due to vote bank politics—

as they have the right to vote now—they cannot embrace Hinduism

with a right to priesthood. Upper caste sociologists sheepishly wonder what is there in priesthood and why should Dalits aspire towards it now? But they do not advise the Hindu priestly class to give up

that very ‘meaningless’ profession in favour of Dalits.
Don’t the upper caste sociologists know that questions like the

right to religion and priesthood cannot and should not be measured

by the income criterion? Religion is related to the cultural life and

history of people. If somebody welcomes a social group into a universal religion with full rights of religion and food culture, why should not a people who were denied that right of universal religion

accept the offer? So long as such a process does not involve violence,

how can Christians or Muslims be stopped from welcoming people into their religion? What does the right to freedom of religion mean as enshrined in the Constitution?

What right do Hindutva organizations like the VHP and RSS have to claim Dalits as Hindus when they are not given the right to religion, priesthood and food culture within the temple and other religious institutions? In Andhra Pradesh, when the government took up the temple entry programme for Dalits, the Hindutva organizations

not only remained totally silent, they, tacitly supported the upper

castes which negated the programme. Shamelessly, some statements

were issued to the effect that Dalits could enter Hindu temples only

when they gave up meat and beef-eating. Why should somebody

give up his/her food culture to become a priest in a Hindu temple?

It is the right of Dalits to embrace any religion that gives them equal rights with full respect to their existing culture. Hindutva organizations, including the BJP, think that they can force people to be their spiritual slaves. As education spreads among the Scheduled

Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes, they will get

into religions that grant them all rights with social and individual

dignity. This is the reason why in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh

and Kashmir, the majority chose Islam, leaving the Brahmins out.

Throughout India the number of educated Scheduled Castes who

think about universal spiritual rights has increased. They too are

moving into other religions rapidly.

The main fear of the Central Government and the Hindutva organizations is that educated tribals and Dalits are making conscious moves to get into religions like Christianity and Buddhism. There

are a large number of educated Sudra (mainly OBC) people who also

think that their children have no spiritual status as Hindus and it is

better to get into non-Hindu religions that give them universal exposure and equal spiritual rights.

A large part of the subcontinent has already become part of the Muslim world. The forces that were thrown out of these regions as

they did not become Muslims were the ***dwijas***, mainly the Brahmins.

The case of Kashmir is a recent one—there all other castes got assimilated into Islam and only the Brahmins (Pandits) were left out. A major part of the Northeast has become Christian and Christianity is

expanding slowly—in spite of resistance from the Hindutva front

organizations.

This is a trend spreading steadily in many parts of India. In South India, a major chunk of Dalits have already gone into Christianity.

Those upper caste people who were converted to Christianity like

the Syrian Christians and Marthoma Christians—despite the fact that

the Hindutva forces have become political rulers—are refusing to

come back to Hinduism. And Udit Raj's Embrace Buddhism movement came at

come back to Hinduism. And Udit Raj's Embrace Buddhism movement came at a time when the world is seriously discussing the clash of civilizations based on religion.

Udit Raj's movement, with the kind of coverage it got in the national and international media, has the strength to grow stronger.

Once the DalitBahujans understand that the social, educational, political and economic powers operate around the temple, church, masjid and vihara, they will plan their future around these institutions. The Hindutva forces have acquired every kind of power only by using religion.

If Udit Raj uses that very same tool to empower his own people, then what is wrong with that? The discussions about the intentions of

Udit Raj and the vitriolic attacks that some of the Dalit leaders and

intellectuals are indulging in (saying that he is an opportunist) do not

carry any conviction. Those intellectuals who keep talking about

landed property being important, do not seem to have realized that

the Brahmins of India got landed power only through religion. Only

when the land became part of a moribund economy did they leave it

to move into the capitalist/bureaucratic system.

Dalit empowerment aims at uplifting the religious status of

Dalits. The movement of Udit Raj has immense liberative potential.

Hindustan Times, 21 November 2001

24

Religion and Democracy

The discourse on the question of the individual's and the community's (or caste's) rights to religion in relation to Hinduism

must also be viewed from the perspective of strengthening democracy in India. It is a known fact that religion is a civil societal system while democracy is a political one. Some recent political theoreticians, of course, divided the concept into ‘civil democracy’ and ‘political democracy’ only to expand the scope of democracy to non-political spheres—particularly to the sphere of civil society. But

the relationship between religion and democracy has always remained a dark area in theoretical discourses.

In the day-to-day life of the individual and the castes, religion and democracy both reinforce and operate antithetically to de-legitimize

each other. For example, in a country such as ours even in the absence of the right to religion for several caste communities in civil society, in the political sphere they were able to get the right to vote

after we adopted constitutional democracy. But if civil society closes

some important options to individuals the right to vote in the political sphere does not make those individuals fully mature democratic beings. Only when all options in civil society are open to all, does a

personality that can make use of political rights evolve.

In Hindu civil society, the full range of options in choosing a direction in life—spiritual, secular or political—are closed to all except Brahmin youth. For all others, the right to choose a spiritual profession is closed. For DalitBahujans, the Hindu religion does not even give an initiation. In the universally known non-Hindu religious civil

societies such as Christianity, Islam or Buddhism, all youth (at least

male youth—the gender discrimination must be taken note of) are

given religious initiation. They can choose to become a Jesuit, a

Mullah or a Monk or they can choose a secular profession such as

medicine or engineering. Or they can choose to become political

medicine or engineering. Or they can choose to become political

leaders. But for all DalitBahujan youth, the option to pursue the

spiritual line of life is closed. Thus, a major section of the Indian

youth in the present religious system of relationships cannot enter

into a religious profession at all. Though this is basically a civil societal right, its absence impinges upon the formation of the personality of the individual and this has implications for democracy. Who is responsible for this situation? What solution does the RSS have for

this problem? How does Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, the first Indian

Prime Minister from a Hindu religious ideological party, resolve this

contradiction?

The seventy to eighty years' work of the RSS did not do anything to resolve this contradiction. The RSS did not address the basic question of untouchability, leave alone the right to religion. It worked very hard to politicize Hinduism but never to democratize it. After

the BJP came to power, it has been sending a large number of RSS

cadres to tribal areas to spread Hinduism. Do all those tribals who

are taken into Hinduism get *dwijahood* or equal rights within that religion? What is the mode of initiation they undergo to call themselves Hindus? Can they call themselves Hindus by retaining their historical food culture, which includes beef as well? Within Hinduism in which caste will they be located? If the tribals embrace Christianity or Islam these religions offer that scope because they make all food and linguistic cultures inclusive. Vegetarianism for the

Shankaracharyas or for that matter for any Brahmin priest, for example, is not a question of a personal habit but a religious condition.

In this mode of religious conditioning how does the tribal essence of

life (food, drink and so on) fit in?

The attempts of the RSS to communalize the DalitBahujans by constructing an image of Muslims and Christians as their enemy did

not make this group Hindus with all the religious rights that other

universal religions offer. Within the present understanding of religion, the RSS is not going to make the DalitBahujans Hindus through mere declarations. It has failed to construct Hinduism as a

religion of love and brother-sisterhood. The RSS has not expanded

the civil societal space to include DalitBahujans and there is no indication that it will expand it for the tribals either. Expansion of such space is based on opening up the spiritual line of promotion to

people who are said to be part of such a religious society. Neither

Golwalker's writings nor those of Vivekananda show any way out for

this contradiction in Hinduism. But this question remains central for

its survival—leave alone expansion.

The right to choose a spiritual mode of life and to reach the top position in that line is part of the set of larger civil societal democratic rights of every individual. This issue acquires a political democratic significance when some individuals or communities are said (or claimed) to be part of that religion but denied that right. When

the civil societal right to be equal with all its members are denied,

the state and the judicial institutions have the right to intervene.

This is where the Indian state and judiciary have failed all these years. The Indian judiciary while examining questions relating to

Hinduism must keep this inequality in mind. The judiciary must also

remember that without a foundation of 'social democracy' at the base

level, political democracy will remain fragile. This was the point

that Ambedkar stressed, much before he embraced Buddhism. Surprisingly, Hindu priests, politicians and judges seem to think even now that religious inequality and political equality can exist side by

side. Such inequalities do not and cannot co-exist. Any amount of

suppression of DalitBahujans while winking at the real problem,

whether within the Sangh Parivar (as happened in the case of Kalyan

Singh) or outside, is not going to stop the structural fragmentation of

civil society. Christianity or Islam provide to those who want a civil

societal democracy in day-to-day life an equalitarian identity different from anything Hinduism can think of in the near future. This is where the crisis of Hinduism lies, and this is going to haunt it in the

twenty-first century.

In the western context, Christian religious relationships and civil and political democratic relationships have evolved as a historical

social mishmash. Once the Church emerged as an institution, the serf

and the feudal lord got equal rights to worship and to become members of one spiritual civil society. This, however, did not give them equal political rights. These were given as capitalism and democracy

evolved hand-in-hand.

The Hindu religion, strangely, right from its inception negated that elemental spiritual democracy. In the Bhakti movement some

Sudras fought for the right to worship Hindu deities. With great reluctance, and in the face of a major threat from Islam, the right to worship was granted to only those Sudras. But this was not a great

change. It was just one step from the Ramayana period when

Shambhuka lost his life only for asking for the right to worship. Till

today, Hindu organizations, including the RSS, have not altered the

religious position of the Sudras. The situation of the Scheduled

Castes is worse.

In the modern period two people tried to reform Hinduism from two different ends—Gandhi from above and Ambedkar from below.

Gandhi failed to democratize it and the world was to be shocked by

his murder by a Hindutva fanatic. Ambedkar attempted to reform it

for a long time. Having realized that it was impossible, he embraced

Buddhism just before his death. Nehru must have thought that the

modernization of India would automatically reform Hinduism too.

But his agenda too failed. Even today Hindu civil society stands in

contradiction with the democratic essence of undistorted human society. What solution does the RSS put forward for this fundamental problem? If the RSS and the Brahmin clergy do not understand this

historical contradiction, Indian democracy will collapse more irretrievably than that of Pakistan. Do they want that to happen?

The Hindu, 18 January' 2000

25

Spiritual Democracy

Ever since a large number of Dalits embraced Buddhism, much intense debate on the significance of Dalit spiritual life has been taking place in the media among religious forces and academia. Oddly, some scholars of sociology began to argue about the futility of discussing the right to religion and the right to priesthood in the context of capitalist modernity.

Similar arguments were heard in the context of the Durban conference about the inclusion of caste in the programme of action of the United Nations. When one examines the conscious arguments

put forward by some academics in relation to all agendas that the

oppressed castes of India set for themselves, one cannot help feeling

that there is a collective conspiracy operating in the form of theoretical casteism in all intellectual spheres of life. The voice of organic intellectuals attempting to demolish the myths of theoretical

casteism is extremely feeble. Mass action by the oppressed castes in

whatever direction they think will liberate them alone will demolish

such myths.

Let us look at the mythical arguments that many progressive and liberal scholars advance to prove that capitalism and political democracy have outgrown the spiritual realm, and hence the fight of the Dalits in this realm is pointless. One is that Dalit liberation becomes possible in the main through politico-economic actions like redistribution of land, pushing for increased wages and claiming a

share in political power. The sophistry that the fight of the Dalits for

equality in all modes of spiritual and civil societal structures, at best, would bring about a marginal change in their lives needs to be countered. It amounts to arguing that the role of religion as an agent of socioeconomic power is over because capitalism has bowled out all

human institutions that operate around religion. They, therefore, suggest that it is futile to invest the energy of the struggling masses in the issues surrounding religion.

Such arguments gloss over the fact that the social bases of capitalism as an economic system and democracy as a political one lie in the spiritual democracy that religions like Buddhism, Christianity

and Islam established. The notion of spiritual democracy is embedded in the early notion that all human beings are equal before God.

early notion that all human beings are equal before God.

Though Buddha did not take the name of any God, establishing the fact that all human beings can attain nirvana as part of Buddhist sangha life was the first principle of spiritual democracy that the world has ever witnessed. India should be proud of this first step taken by the Buddha because nationalism should always celebrate and rest on democratic values, not authoritarian or fascist ones.

Unfortunately the Aryan ruler-centred (around Rama and Krishna) spiritual tradition went against this democratic tradition, leading to spiritual casteism. It is this spiritual casteism that led to the establishment of spiritual fascism. All those intellectuals who benefited from spiritual casteism, irrespective of their present ideological position, pretend to ignore it as if it is natural. This is the reason why Indian nationalism and Buddhism were not made coterminous, but nationalism and Hinduism were. Had India moved in the Buddhist direction in terms of religion at the time of the anti-British struggle, India would have been one of the most advanced nations in the world by now. We would have abolished Brahminism in all spheres of life. The Dalits alone have taken that path.

The second major step towards establishing spiritual democracy was taken by Jesus. He centred his discourse on the notion of God quite formidably to establish a fundamental democratic principle that before God all—including Jews, Samaritans (the untouchables of Israel), slaves and women—were equal. In subsequently denying the

right to priesthood to women, Christianity went against Jesus's teaching. However, the right to priesthood for all classes and tribes and for women to be part of church congregations were among the first major steps in the realm of spiritual democracy in Asia.

The politico-legal democratic principle that all are equal before

law was first established as a Christian ethic and is an extension of

the spiritual principle that all are equal before God. The Hinduism

which is linked to the Vedic texts went astray by not recognizing that

all castes are equal before God. This is where Buddhism and Hinduism stood against each other in the Indian subcontinent. Here again Christianity as an Asian-born religion went against Hinduism. Because of the common character of spiritual democracy, Buddhism expanded eastwards and westwards, even encircling Israel, the land

of Jesus, and Christianity expanded westwards.

Because of spiritual casteism, Hinduism did not spread anywhere beyond the caste-centred societies of India and Nepal. Islam, with the initiative of Prophet Mohammed, started as a more radical spiritual democracy. At once it liberated women as

Mohammed himself married a widowed businesswoman. The

Quran was the first book of one voice that framed the rules of spiritual democracy, giving equal rights to all tribes, castes and classes within a broad patriarchal framework. It also took the first step towards advancing science within the framework of religion. Since Islam did not allow radical reforms, it subsequently stagnated by

slowly pushing itself into spiritual authoritarianism. When Christianity faced the challenge of Islam, it allowed radical reforms within, leading to the growth of Protestantism.

The processes of industrial and democratic revolutions in the West must be located in the process of deepening spiritual democracy in the Christian realm where spiritual democracy transformed the civil societal base into social

liberalism. Reforms in Hinduism,

Buddhism and Islam were no match for the onward march of spiritual and political democracy and the advancement of science and technology that found social support within the Christian world.

The dialectical relationship between spirituality and the human

mind stilted the march of atheistic socialist thought. Otherwise,

socialism would have spread across the globe. But in spite of what

some of our leftist intellectuals assume, religion as a social system

is not yet bowled out.

The present process of globalization along with the market will also result in competition between religions where the religions that

have radical reformative abilities may struggle against spiritual authoritarian and spiritual fascist modes wherever and in whichever form they survive. Since the dignity of labour is going to play a crucial role in global capitalist modernity, the religions that compete even in the spiritual market by expanding the space for rational

thinking will attract the educated mind. In this process, a Hinduism

that refuses to grant spiritual democratic rights to the Dalits, who live

around it, might face a problem.

Times of India, 12 December 2001

26

Where Should the Reform Begin?

Where do we begin to reform our society? With untouchability, of course. When we say this, everyone, including a Brahmin, a Reddy

or an OBC, pretends to agree. But the question is, how to go about it?

Reform has to begin from the core of the system. It should start with

a change in the thinking of all the social forces involved. Reforms

should start from where such practices began.

P. V. Kane, the father of modern Brahminism, who has been awarded a Bharat Ratna for re-writing the ***Dharma Shastra,*** says, 'Untouchability did not and does not arise by birth alone. It arises in various ways. Persons become outcastes and untouchable by being

guilty of certain acts that amount to grave sins. For example, Manu

prescribes that those who are guilty of Brahmana (Brahmin) murder,

theft of Brahmana's gold or drinkers of liquor should be excommunicated: no one should dine with them or teach them, or officiate as priests for them, nor should marriages take place with them.'

But what we see all around is that children born in the 59 Scheduled Castes in Andhra Pradesh alone, before they can walk and talk leave alone involve themselves in any sinful activity—such as Kane

describes—become untouchables. What is the solution to this?

If we go by the investigations into our socioeconomic and cultural life, the contribution of these castes has been far greater than any other. If we go by their cumulative contribution, all those who

live as untouchables today must be accorded the highest status. But

the status of caste communities has been defined in terms of their

relationship with the Hindu priesthood, which is linked to the Sanskrit language. Look at the diabolism of Indian nationalism. If one takes the caste-wise breakup of children studying in schools established by Christian missionaries in the English medium, the highest number are Brahmins. Leading theoreticians who condemn missionary education, and others who eulogize Sanskrit as the prime national language, again come from the same caste. Those whom the very

same theoreticians condemn as unethical, un-nationalistic—the

DalitBahujans—are forced to study regional languages like Telugu,

Hindi, Kannada and Bengali. In fact, what is good for a Brahmin

should also be good-for the other castes and without being hypocritical they should have declared English our national language. Just as it is for the vast majority of Brahmins and the rich belonging to other

castes, the children of the poor who study in government schools

should be taught English as a primary language. And every child's

mother tongue should be taught as the second language.

The issue of rooting out untouchability is even now linked to the question of popular priesthood. The Indian state must acquire control over all temple activities and appoint untouchables and none else (at least for a few decades) as priests. They should also serve as

ritual priests in the households of all caste communities.

Here again the question of language arises. The brahminic argument is that the chanting of mantras in temples and in the rituals should be carried out only in Sanskrit. Where are there so many SCs

who know Sanskrit? The answer to the problem is simple. In the relationship between God and the people it is the content of the discourse or communication that matters, not the language. The state, therefore, should make arrangements for translation of the mantras

from Sanskrit to Telugu (for example in Andhra Pradesh) and the

chanting both in the temples and in other rituals can take place in

Telugu (it is already taking place in Tamil), Hindi, Kannada, Marathi

and for that matter in English also if people want it. The priests

would say that such talk, leave alone the action itself, is blasphemous. What is blasphemous is their own practice, not the attempt to reform it.

A major dissection of the relationship between language, spirituality and social control should take place. The modern democratic state cannot and should not close its eyes to this fundamental aspect

of social transformation. Even in spirituality it is unethical to say you

can communicate with Gods/Goddesses only in this language and

not in others. Look at the politics of priesthood. Their presumption

of the Aryan Hindu Gods understanding Sanskrit and hence the necessity for the reciting of a Sanskrit mantra is understandable. But how can they presume that a non-Aryan Goddess like Pochamma (to

propitiate whom they recite Sanskrit mantras) would also understand

a Sanskrit shloka? How can the priests presume that Shirdi Saibaba,

son of a boatman/woman who talked to people in Marathi, wanted a

mantra to be recited to him in Sanskrit? The construction of God/

Goddess worship in a particular language is a political construction

to retain the hegemony of the priestly class. The universal assumption is that Gods and Goddesses can be prayed to in any language, old prayers can be translated into all other languages and new prayers

can be written in any language.

The state must stop this politics of language in the sphere of religion. Prayer in any religion should take place in any language. The people have a right to communicate with the God/Goddess they

believe in, in their own language. If a particular religion claims that

a particular community is part of that religion, it should automatically

grant it the right to priesthood. In any organization, the right to reach

the highest position is central to the organization—whether it is spiritual, political or economic. Since Hinduism is claiming that Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and OBCs are part of it, the right to priesthood must be given to them by the state.

M. N. Srinivas, a Brahmin sociologist who proposes the theory of Sanskritization of society, says, 'A priest is a representative of the

religion and the theological system which commanded the respect

and allegiance of all, including the political head on religious occasions.' A radical change in this institution and its body and language is called for. For 4,000 years, the DalitBahujans of India have been

denied the power of priesthood. For not allowing them all these

years, the Shankaracharyas of all *peethas* should apologize to the SCs, STs and OBCs. The SCs must be given a ceremonial apology in all

the temples of India for having been treated as untouchable for so

many centuries. If the priestly classes do not do this they have no

right to tell the people not to embrace Christianity or any other religion that wants to give them that right to priesthood and the power to control religious institutions. That amounts to 'preserving religious fascism through electoral polities'.

The opening of priesthood to DalitBahujans along with the changing of the language and discourse between the devotee and the

God/Goddess in India amounts to the beginning of Dalitization of

the spiritual system. Unlike the numerically small Brahmin caste, no

DalitBahujan caste as a whole can turn into a priestly caste. While

one person holds the position of priest, the other will be an agrarian

worker, another will be a tanner in the same family and another one

may, perhaps, hold a government job. Productivity, creativity and

spirituality will operate in a language of communicability in the family, community (no longer caste) and also the village. If an untouchable becomes a priest who can command respect in every house, he should not recreate the culture of *pada puja* (worship at the feet) of the priest. He/she should be a democratic representative of the spiritual agency who talks your language, who drinks your water and eats your cooked food. A democratic relationship between the priest,

people and God/Goddess changes the structure of temples where, as

Phule says, 'plundering and property making' from temple money

would stop; where temples may become simple and small with a

murthy (idol) or without a murthy. The temples would serve the purpose of schooling during the day, while prayers can take place in the morning and evening. Thus every village will have a temple and a

school as well.

Chandrababu Naidu must realize that translating mantras into Telugu in all the temples in Andhra Pradesh and appointing DalitBahujans as priests is a must even for the socioeconomic modernization that he is talking about. Or Telugus will not acquire the self-respect that he is talking about. Unless the priesthood is

shifted into the untouchable community, the status of untouchables

at the village level will not change.

Without this reform, organizing any number of Janma Bhoomis, or constituting any number of judicial commissions like the Justice

Punnaiah Commission will not solve the problem. A respectable

political party that conducted a survey in Andhra Pradesh discovered

about 25 forms of untouchability being practised in every district. If

in deference to the priests this reform is not taken up, India will shamelessly be carrying untouchability and brahminical casteism into the twenty-first century wherein angry untouchables shall tear the Indian system apart. Let us not allow that to happen.

Deccan Chronicle, 7 November 1999

PART 6
On Electoral Politics

27

Sonia, Swadeshi and Videshi

A debate has been started around Sonia Gandhi's citizenship rights, specifically over whether, as a woman of Italian birth who married

into an Indian family, she is entitled to all citizenship rights, including the right to contest elections, and, in the event of being elected to the Indian Parliament, whether she can hold a post like that of

minister or Prime Minister. The BJP and its allies have raked this up

as a political morality issue, as the Congress proposed her name for

the position of Prime Minister. Even political parties like the

Samajwadi Party and the Telegu Desam joined the issue along with

the Sangh Parivar forces.

Ever since Sonia Gandhi became the president of the Congress the Sangh Parivar has started a systematic campaign about her Christian background and also her *videshi* (foreign) origin. Their attacks on Indian Christians, in fact, started as part of this campaign. Their notion of *swadeshi* is equated with their notion of Hindutva. In the forthcoming parliamentary elections the BJP and its allies, it appears, will make the foreign birth of Sonia Gandhi a major campaign plank.

In the background of India's experience as a colonized country such

a plank may influence the urban upper caste middle classes. Even a

section of educated Dalit-Bahujans may also get carried away with

such propaganda. But such a campaign will destroy the very notion

such propaganda. But such a campaign will destroy the very notion

of natural justice and it will redefine the concept of citizenship in

classical brahminical terms.

In the classical brahminical understanding, a Sudra or a Chandala has no right of citizenship. As a corollary of this understanding, they do not have the right to rule a state except by defiance, which invites crushing by force. Only the Brahmins and the Kshatriyas had citizenship rights. This exclusive citizenship right granted to two

upper caste communities, according to Ambedkar, was responsible

for foreign domination and political control of India by foreigners at different intervals. Because of the exclusive citizenship rights held

by the upper castes, these communities were always perceived by

the productive masses, who won citizenship rights only during the

colonial period, as more foreign than the White rulers themselves.

Thus, even a person like Vajpayee, whose descendants never lived

as part of the masses, does not automatically become ‘our man’ simply because he was born in India, and for the simple reason that Sonia Gandhi was born in Italy she does not automatically become

‘their woman’ so far as the masses are concerned. In fact, both

Vajpayee and Sonia Gandhi are alien to the vast Dravidian masses of

India. Even though their skin colours differ, both of them look foreign to the masses.

Once a person becomes a citizen of a country, his/her birth should not become a point of propaganda. Particularly, the principle of democracy and the understanding of citizenship rights must deter political agencies from indulging in such propaganda. If the vote mobilization strategists of the BJP and its allies think that the Italian birth of Sonia Gandhi can legitimately be made a point of political

political

propaganda, by the same logic Vajpayee's birth in a Brahmin family

can and should become a similar point. Because in terms of the dayto-day life of the SC, ST and OBC masses, Vajpayee's community's social life is more distant even today than that of the community into which Sonia Gandhi was born and brought up.

The Whites touch all castes and taste all foods unlike the upper castes even today. It is a different thing if Sonia Gandhi is seen as

part of the Nehru-Indira Gandhi family, whose basic social roots are

not different from that of Vajpayee: Kashmiri Brahmin. But in a major respect the Nehru-Indira Gandhi family became different from that of Vajpayee. It became a family of plural cultures because of the inter-religious marriages that took place over a period of time. It is a known fact that Feroze Gandhi, husband of Indira Gandhi, was a

Parsi, Sonia Gandhi came from a Christian background, while

Priyanka Gandhi is married to a Christian. Such a social transformation through family ties should be respected rather than attacked. Should the nation treat such a transformation of families as criminal? Do Vajpayee's election strategists want to arrest social fusion and construct everything into the mould of brahminical Hindutva?

The nation has not yet forgotten the fact that Indira Gandhi, while

she was the Prime Minister of the nation, was not allowed to enter

the Puri Jagannath temple as she was treated as a Parsi. At that time, if I am not wrong, Vajpayee was a member even if he was not a

prominent leader in the party Did he oppose such religious barbarity? Did he build a movement to reform his beloved Hindu religion?

This nation should have been proud of Indira Gandhi's courage and conviction to have married a person from a community that upholds the dignity of labour. It is in this community that a woodcutter proudly calls himself/herself Lakdawala,

a vegetable vendor

Tarkariwala, a shoemaker a Mochiwala and all of them are equal in

their religion. No Parsi temple closes its door to any human being.

Have Hinduism or the Hindutva party that Vajpayee leads with such

pride today, ever tried to learn any social morality from that community? Never.

The BJP and its cadre collected information about Sonia Gandhi's background in the minutest detail. Do they dare to put such details

about Vajpayee, Advani, and so on, before the nation? The slogan

and the snide remarks that get passed about Sonia smack of the cultural degradation of the Hindu patriarchs. The religious bigotry of these forces puts the whole nation in a bad light in the international community.

When Indira Gandhi faced the first elections in 1967 the Opposition and also the 'Conservative Congress' leaders attacked her sexuality, widowhood, her relationship with her husband, and so on. The Indian masses did not care. Many so-called veterans that attacked her

did not even get back their deposits. One gets the feeling that by

talking more and more about the personal background of Sonia

Gandhi the Hindu patriarchs are going to dig their own grave. These

political parties should know that if they talk more and more about

Sonia Gandhi's videshi-ness she will bring in the sacrifices of the

Nehru-Gandhi family and she will also rope in Mahatma Gandhi's

assassination by the RSS for purposes of election propaganda. After

all as the granddaughter-in-law of Nehru, she can count many more

martyrs among her near and dear ones than Vajpayee can think of

doing. In fact he does not have any. The martyrdom of one vote in

the parliament does not become equal to the heads of her mother-inlaw and husband. Let us not forget the fact that the nation does not survive by counting who has more swadeshi martyrs in their cupboards. The so-called swadeshi-walas should remember that the Congress was started by A. O. Hume and once was headed by Annie Besant, and both of them were foreigners.

The nation should not debate whether Sonia Gandhi is videshi or swadeshi, but rather ask: how swadeshi was Vajpayee's government

during the 13 months it effectively ruled the nation? What improvement did it bring about in the living standards of the rural and urban poor? What happened to land distribution? What happened to the

Women's Reservation Bill? What are the prime ministerial candidates going to offer the nation in terms of their programmes?

During the last 13 months several wrong trends have set into the system. Religious bigotry and brutal casteism have taken new forms

to commit atrocities on the innocent masses. Insecurity among Christians is forcing them to withdraw from many social service sectors where they had been rendering vital services—schools, hospitals,

old-age homes, destitute homes and so on. The Hindutva forces that

attacked the agents of social service have not established any alternative service structures. The Dalits in many parts of the country have become easy targets. What remedies will the new government

provide for all these maladies? The parties and the prime ministerial

candidates should place their positive programmes before the nation

which is going to enter the twenty-first century with the highest percentage of illiterates, unemployed youth, child labourers, HIV-positive patients, and so on.

Deccan Chronicle, 9 May 1999

28

The End of Dalit Ideology?

Some Dalit writers have been arguing for some time that the enmity between Dalits and Sudras/OBCs is bitterer than that between Dalits

and Brahmins. Hence, they argue, a social coalition among Dalits and

Brahmins is possible. In the context of the formation of the coalition government in Uttar Pradesh by the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and

the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), some sort of credibility for a DalitBrahmin alliance theory is gaining ground. Within the ranks of the BJP, the Brahmin leaders were more enthusiastic about the coalition

than the others. Some right wing elites from the ranks of Sangh

Parivar organizations think that there is no scope for a physical conflict between Dalits and Brahmins in the economic realm. Hence they conclude that a coalition can be forged between these communities, in spite of the fact that they are poles apart in terms of their social status. They believe this to be true particularly in the rural

setting, since the Brahmins have moved away from landed property.

At the same time, conflict situations continue to operate between

Dalits and Sudras/OBCs. They therefore think that this conflict

should be highlighted and used for political purposes.

This idea began to take shape after the failure of coalition ties between the Samajwadi Party and the BSP on the one hand, and the

non-formation of cohesive relations between Dalits and OBCs in the

socio-political realm even in the pan-Indian context. A section of the Dalit intelligentsia argues that the oppressive nature of the Hindu

religion need not be made an issue because a section of Dalits live

religion need not be made an issue because a section of Dalits live

within Buddhist/Christian religious cultures. Hence, a DalitBrahmin

coalition is possible if friendly relations between brahminic Hinduism and Buddhist/Christian religions begin to operate.

In the case of the Sudras/OBCs, the allegiance to Hinduism is still primitive and there is hardly any critical assessment of how

Brahminism has darkened their identity. But the Scheduled Caste

intelligentsia have largely assessed this allegiance and chosen an

alternative path by carving out a definite identity for themselves.

Ambedkar initiated that process in a big way. Hence, what is uppermost in the mind of some SC intelligentsia is that upward mobility in the spheres of economy and politics will be possible only when they

join hands with Brahmins. Such intelligentsia from both sides mediated between the BJP and the BSP to form a coalition government with a definite understanding. If the Mayavati government works for

five years, this thinking may strengthen. Dalit ideology, then, may

take a different direction.

There is, however, a serious misjudgment of the relationships between SCs and OBCs on the one hand and the SCs and Brahmins

on the other, in both Uttar Pradesh, and the larger national context.

The fundamental question that one needs to ask, even in the UP

context, is has the concept of establishing a ‘Bahujan Samaj’ by uniting SC-OBCs undergone a total change? Does Bahujan Samaj also mean Dalit-*dwija* unity as well? The Dalit intellectuals who are talking about a DalitBrahmin coalition do not theorize social relations from historical experience. They do not base their opinions on a

transformative ideology or discuss the spiritual realm at all. All their arguments

flow from a basic concern for the economic development

of Dalits. Nobody can dismiss these concerns, but economic issues

form only part of the problem considered by Ambedkar, the philosopher of social change in India. The uncritical and crude economic pursuits of Sudras/OBCs should not mislead the historical vision of

Ambedkarites. Such a course will have serious consequences to the

process of socio-political change in India.

Ambedkar wrote two full-length books to examine the relationship between Sudras, Untouchables and Brahminism. These books dealt with two important questions: *(i)* Who are the Sudras? How did they become the fourth varna? and *fit)* Untouchables, who are they and why did they become untouchables? In the first book he said,

'Indeed until the fifth varna of the untouchables came into being, the Sudras were in the eyes of Hindus the lowest of the low. This shows

the nature of what might be called the problems of the Sudras.' He

adds that the 'system of pains and penalties was no doubt originally

devised by the Brahmins to deal with the Sudras of the Indo-Aryan

society, who ceased to exist as a distinct, separate, identifiable community.'

If we carefully examine the spiritual and cultural divide between the whole of Sudras/OBC and dwija society we find that it was not

correct to say that Sudras, as Ambedkar believed, did not cease to be

distinct from dwijas. In fact the common cultural ground between

Sudras and Dalits is quite a bit more visible than the common cultural ground between Dalits and Brahmins.

There is a basic difference between development of a section of society and transformation of the whole society. When Ambedkar

targeted Brahminism and Hinduism, he had both the transformation

of Dalits and also the rest of society in his scheme. He did not see

the OBCs (at that time Sudras) as the oppressors. He saw their caste

consciousness as an imposed consciousness, not as one that was constructed by their historical self. Now we can see the productive cultural ethic between Dalits and OBCs as a common bonding. Such a bonding does not exist between Dalits and Brahmins. Brahmins as a

caste operate completely within the sphere of a non-productive elite

economy. Their intellectuality is only a derived intellectuality,

whereas the Dalit intellectuality is rooted in the processes of production. The OBCs too have that fundamental basis of a productivitycentred knowledge system.

Dalits have three great prophetic images—Buddha, Jesus and Ambedkar—to confront the Hindu divine images. As the spread of

these images within Dalit-Adivasi society increases, the Brahmins

have no option but to recognize the socio-spiritual strength of Dalits.

The OBCs neither owned these images nor did they construct alternatives to improve their transformative abilities. That is the reason why the OBCs as a social category will not be able to challenge the

brahminic social order.

There is no alternative philosophical discourse among the OBCs and that is enough for them to be ignored in every sphere of life.

The Mulayam Singh and Laloo Prasad phenomenon will not have a

lasting impact on Indian society since the socio-spiritual Hindu system is not afraid of them. They are still operating a slightly repositioned numbers game within the broad electoral system. That itself does not have transformative

impact on society. For example, one of

the reasons why the BJP is afraid of Kanshi Ram is that, at any point, he may give a call to embrace Buddhism. He has already gone on

record that he will embrace Buddhism along with a minimum of

thirty million Dalits. The Sangh Parivar is more afraid of that possibility than the spectre of Mayavati forming a government in UP.

They hope that, if the coalition government at Lucknow stops this

process and if Kanshi Ram dies without taking recourse to the conversion route, the Hindu religion would be saved from a great danger. There is no OBC leader worth the name who can give an alternative transformative slogan. The slogan of secularism is not a

transformative one, but rather a status-quo-ist one.

The reason for non-existence of a transformative agenda among the OBCs is that there is philosophical poverty among the OBCs in

particular and the Sudras in general. So long as the brahminic philosophy is not afraid of the power of a community it need not recognize its existence, leave alone its identity. The coalition in UP may be, in a way, a victory for Dalit politics. But that would negate the

basis of formation of a Bahujan Samaj under the leadership of Dalits.

In order to achieve that goal, Kanshi Ram propagated the great alliance of Mahatma Phule, Ambedkar and Perivar, but OBC society did not respond to this ideology of Bahujanism because, at the religious

level, the OBCs were strongly hanging onto Hindu Brahminism even

though their status in that religion is only as the ‘feet-born’. Though the Dalits were forced to be untouchables and remain economically

poorer than the OBCs, in the recent past, their philosophical basis

and identity have staged a comeback.

The OBCs are still at the primitive level of consciousness and therefore do not pose any threat to the oppressors, the community

rather remains a threat to itself. This is the predicament of Sudras/

OBCs. But what is the responsibility of the more conscious ideological forces that have come from the most oppressed in the society?

They must lead even the less conscious among the other oppressed,

but not join hands with the oppressors and declare that the less conscious oppressed are more dangerous than the historical oppressors themselves. That leads to the end of Dalit ideology itself.

Deccati Herald, 12 August 2002

29

Major Priorities

The Vishwa Hindu Parishad has been saying that it will not be bound by any court judgment on the question of building the Ram

temple at the disputed site in Ayodhya. It has also rejected the insistence of the BJP-Ied Central Government that it should abide by the verdict of the judiciary. It is no secret that the VHP is part of the BJP

and RSS and all of them draw sustenance from Hindu spiritual-political thought. How can an organization that operates within India, publicly say that it does not have to respect the authority of the state?

Second, how and why can it so easily declare that it will not comply

with a judicial decision if it goes against its faith?

In the recent past, particularly since the Mandal judgment which drew a *lakshman rekha* of 50 percent for positive discrimination—all court judgments are viewed as binding and no organization can publicly undermine the judiciary.

If the Dalits and OBCs were to declare that they were not bound by the Mandal judgment, such a statement

would have been treated as contempt of court. We have seen how

the court has dealt with Arundhati Roy and Medha Patkar on the

Narmada issue. There is no reason why the apex court or high courts

should not charge those who are calling for a negation of judicial

norms with contempt of court.

In effect, by these actions, the Hindu religion, in the context of the existence of many religions in India, is not only majoritarian but has also declared itself to be above the state. There is a historical

tradition of brahminic hegemony claiming a spiritual-political status

that is above the state. Neither the state nor the judiciary prohibited the practice of casteism in temples. Whether in the case of Indira

Gandhi, as Prime Minister, being barred from entering the Puri

temple or the Krishna temple in Guruvayoor, Kerala, or when the

priesthood has openly prohibited Sudras and Dalits from entering

such places, the state has been a mute witness.

Though the Indian Constitution abolished untouchability, within temples and among the priestly class, this abhorrent practice has continued. Again the courts have never stepped in to ban such discriminatory practices, suggesting that the perpetrators were somehow beyond reproach. In a democratic and secular state, no temple,

mosque or church should be allowed a privileged status. But, unfortunately, the situation is different in India because the Hindu religion has always claimed an exclusive position and had dominated the socio-spiritual space. As a result, the state and judiciary have not really felt too discomfited by the Hindu religion’s relative autonomy.

It is a similar trend that has gradually undermined the authority of the state in Pakistan. The coexistence of political democracy and a

sort of socio-spiritual ‘casteocracy’ seems on the face of it a contradiction in terms. In fact, Hinduism has internalized the systemic contradictions that sustain inequalities. If these inequalities are abolished, many proponents of the supremacy of Hinduism fear that

it could well collapse like a house of cards as a consequence. The

inability or unwillingness of the state to resolve such contradictions suggests an institutionalized belief that it is in the natural order of things for Hinduism to enjoy privileged and superior status.

In Pakistan, it was the state’s tacit endorsement of the superiority of Islam above all other faiths that gradually came to undermine the

authority of the various arms of the state. Today, things have reached such a pass that no one, irrespective of whether they are democratically elected leaders or military dictators, can make religion operate under the overall supervision of the state. The basic philosophy of

the Indian Constitution, from which the judiciary derives its power,

is built on secularism, but the nature and tone of discourse emanating from various saffron platforms suggests that the judiciary is being taken for granted. Such elements have been emboldened by the ascent to power of political formations purportedly sympathetic to the cause of Hindutva.

Indeed, there is no denying that today there are people in crucial

public positions who seem to owe allegiance more to their religion

than to the various institutions of a secular and democratic state. In this atmosphere, there are increased fears among minority religions

and suppressed castes. The very state which is supposed to ensure

equal treatment to all its citizens is being seen as succumbing to

partisanship. Similarly, in Pakistan, the state's inaction emboldened, indeed empowered, certain religious elements to such an extent that

the jehadis among them have wreaked havoc both within Pakistan

and in other parts of the world, and Pakistan has been the focus of

international opprobrium. If the Pakistani state introspects today, it will find that it did nothing to stem the propaganda emanating from

madrassas which existed parallel to state-run schools precisely because they were seen as propagating Islamic thought and traditions.

The Indian state and judiciary have never been too bothered by the nature of the education imparted in Hindu religious schools or in

RSS training camps. Many of our elected representatives and crucial

policy-makers are deeply religious people to whom there is no contradiction in state complicity in promoting religion. Much has also to do with public, mainly middle class, perceptions that all religious organizations are necessarily pious and engaged in 'good' works. This is why they have flourished, and unless we are more vigilant there is

nothing to prevent us going the Pakistan way. Faith must revert to its original place in the personal domain, it must never assume greater

importance in the public realm than the state and judiciary.

A part of this problem began during the nation's formative years when spiritualized nationalism became a normative ideology for

many nationalist leaders. Tilak, Gandhi and Jinnah centred the nationalist discourse on religion. Only two top influential leaders, Ambedkar and Nehru, tried to oppose the infusion of religion into

the heart of nationalism. But the brand of politics that both the BJP

and RSS espouse has given religion such a pre-eminent position in

public discourse that today it threatens to overwhelm all democratic

institutions through which the Indian state functions. This could damage our secular fabric irreversibly.

Times of India, 8 March 2002

PART 7
On Culture

30

Cow and Culture

Is a cow's life worthier than those of five Dalits? The Dalits have had to pay an enormous price—remaining untouchables—for removing carcasses from villages and towns for thousands of years. They have had to pay the price of remaining illiterate and insecure in order to build up the leather economy of India. If they had not removed dead cattle, dogs and even humans, the people in the towns and villages would have died of dreadful contagious diseases. Even now they continue to pay the price—sometimes with their lives as happened at Jhajhar in Haryana.

All that was essentially scientific was constructed as spiritually bad and sinful in the *Manu Dharma Shastra.* Such superstitions continue to be passed off as spiritual and scriptural, but more shocking than that is the fact that Hindutva organizations such as the VHP want to implement them, emboldened by the fact that their ideological twins are at the helm of the state. They killed five Dalits for skinning a dead cow on a roadside in Haryana. They say the Hindu scriptures prohibit such an act. To bolster their case for the modernist legal context, the murderers say the Dalit youths were skinning a live cow.

The leather industry was one of the first that Indian society established, much before the Europeans and Americans, but instead of being proud of it, society has rendered its builders 'untouchable'. There is something basically wrong with this mode of understanding divinity and spirituality. The problem is deeper than the present behaviour of the VHP and its ilk. An anti-scientific temper runs deep in the Hindu psyche. Does this not deserve much more serious debate? Is the struggle against such a spiritual psyche to be carried on only by the Dalits?

Many of the VHP leaders themselves are industrialists. Some of them are training their children in America—their dreamland—to become successful industrialists. Some of them are even involved in the leather industry. How does

the leather industry exist without skinning dead cattle? If being in the leather business is not sinful, how does skinning a carcass become sinful? How does leather come into existence without skinning dead animals? The *Shastras* say that it was for doing this early industrial work that the Dalits became untouchable. Now Dalits get lynched for doing this job. What kind of nationalism is this?

Incidentally, when this took place I was touring America—the dreamland of many Indians, as just mentioned. I met many boys and girls—many of them Brahmin too—who are working in beef-packing and leather units. A majority of them eat beef as well. Do all of them become untouchables? By invoking the same scriptures that the Hindutva forces are talking about, they too should be declared untouchable and should **never** be allowed to enter the Hindu Rashtra that Bal Thackeray is talking about. But these beef-eating NRIs fill their coffers with dollars and hence they are most lovable. How do they explain this mode of Hinduism?

Indians do not live with one set of scriptures. We have the Buddhist scriptures, we have had the Bible as a living book for 2,000 years in India. The Quran has been in India for more than 1,000 years. The Dalits in the spiritual realm have more affinity with Buddhism and Christianity than Hinduism. In their spiritual realm, the cow is not sacred. How can Hindutva forces impose their spirituality on others? And how can spirituality allow so much hypocrisy, terrorism and brutality in day-to-day life? Hindutva forces want to welcome economic globalization but do not want to have anything to do with the process of cultural globalization. How do global spiritual cultures see the relationship between animals and human beings? Is it not important to learn from all positive cultures?

In the economic realm, they want to carry on the leather business; in the political realm, they want to use Dalits as vote-givers, and in the spiritual realm, the science and technological processes that the Dalits as historical people constructed became impure, polluted. Not that the professions that the OBCs are involved in their day-to-day life—washing clothes, making pots and rearing sheep and cattle— have become spiritually acceptable for Hindutva forces. They too still—perhaps forever—remain impure. All the Sudras/OBCs involved in productive activity are still unacceptable as priests in Hindu temples. But their muscle power becomes acceptable to kill Dalits in the name of cow protection, Muslims in the name of religion. Even the Yadavs who work within Hindutva organizations do not ask why the buffalo, that gives us most of our milk, is not

organizations do not ask why the buffalo, that gives us most of our milk, is not sacred. Our intellectual class does not ask why Hindu nationalism is constructed around issues such as animal sacredness and human pollution. When I asked this question at my Columbia University talk, the Indian diaspora intellectuals appeared to agree entirely with me. But how much writing do they do on such issues is the moot question. What kind of theoretical and practical nationalism do we have? No one asks why the cow alone should remain a constitutionally protected animal under the Directive Principles of State Policy.

Today the whole world knows that the AfricanAmerican's culture has been assimilated not only in American civil society, it has become part of the state system as well. The American Constitution values the Black life absolutely equally to the White life. Indian intellectuals must realize that the civil war to grant equal rights for Blacks was not fought only by Blacks, but by Whites under the leadership of Abraham Lincoln. AfricanAmerican taxi drivers tell a lot of positive stories about White intellectuals. They tell them because many of those men and women sacrificed their lives for the freedom of the Blacks. In India has such a rebellion against the barbarity of treating the life of a cow as more worthy than those of five Dalits taken place? Imagine such a thing taking place against AfricanAmericans today. Would not such an incident have created conditions for another civil war? Look at the way Indian legal agencies are dealing with this brutality. They are waiting to find out whether the cow was dead or alive when it was skinned.

The Hindutva forces do not think of abandoning such superstitious notions of life and religion. So far there is no evidence of Hindu spiritual leadership coming down heavily on the VHP even on this issue. The rulers in New Delhi remain indifferent as well. After the BJP came to power, the cow question has been brought to the national agenda again and again. Earlier, it was always in reference to Muslims. Now Dalits get lynched. Their very livelihood is attacked.

The OBCs who are being increasingly used for all kinds of fundamentalist activity including the Gujarat pogrom, were possibly employed in this lynching of Dalits as well. Many Dalit activists have been complaining that more and more the OBCs are getting involved in attacks against them. The OBCs must realize that the very same fundamentalists are going to say that caste hierarchical practices must come into operation in classical form. They may disqualify them from contesting elections and administering the state. The Hindutva attacks did not stop with Muslims. They went on to target Christians and now the Dalits. Now at least the whole nation must stand up against this kind of spiritual and

political nationalism.

The Hindu, 25 October 2002

31

Cows, Buffaloes and Nationalism

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in its National Council resolutions passed in Nagpur recently made the ‘ban on slaughter of the cow and its progeny’ the fifth out of nineteen resolutions. It demanded that the Government of India ‘should implement such a ban effectively.’ Why is the BJP asking the government to ban only cow slaughter? Why not a ban on buffalo slaughter as well? Both buffalos and cows are milch animals. If we go by the love and affection that our DalitBahujan masses show towards both these animals then both should have the same respectability. But in the Hindutva agenda so far, the buffalo has had no place. Of course, the upper castes drink its milk in various forms: in tea and coffee, as yoghurt, buttermilk and finally ghee. Its milk is part of Brahmin spirituality, but the buffalo as an animal does not have any respectable place in Hindu literature.

Why does the buffalo not find a similar place to the cow with regard to individual and collective protection in the agenda of a national ruling party? This is a serious problem for Hindutva nationalism. If we conduct an economic survey today, the buffalo would emerge as the source of livelihood for millions of poor families all over India—in fact, the buffalo is dearer to them than the cow. For the Hindu brahminical spirituality, Sudras, Chandalas and Adivasis became unworthy of respect, untouchable and polluted because they ate meat. Between the cow and buffalo which eat the same grass, why has the buffalo spiritually and politically become untouchable; why has only the cow become so preferred?

It is a historical fact that both these animals are not only equally loved, nurtured and their progeny propagated but the DalitBahujan masses have gained enormously from them ever since they were domesticated. The DalitBahujans graze, bathe and clean the dung of both these animals. It is for the BJP to find out and tell us how many sadhus and sanyasis, who get spiritual gratification from telling stories about the sacredness of the cow, love to take it for grazing.

How many children of the Sangh Parivar leaders are trained to graze cows in the fields as they are ‘sacred’ animals? On the contrary one can find hundreds of DalitBahujan children feeding and nurturing these animals. Many of their lives have been sacrificed in the service of cattle in India through the ages. We know how much they were humiliated for such service and where they stand economically today. These are the people who should have the right to decide which animal should have more nationally respectable space in a democracy. Is it the people who love and live with these animals or a political party that prefers to perpetuate brahminical values that should decide which should be our national animal?

Deciding that a particular animal is nationally respectable and preservable automatically implies that the other animals, though performing an economically more useful purpose, become unimportant. Neither a gradual loss of their progeny nor their extinction become the concern of the ruling class. The worship of animals is a primitive mode of ritualism. The first opposition to animal and idol worship came from the most ancient Asian prophet, Isaiah, around 850 B.C.E. and the second opposition came from Buddha around 600 B.C.E. In fact, only when animal worship was stopped did the use of animals for productive purposes increase. Animal worship seems to have continued as long as the animals remained the main source of food. While the buffalo and cow as food resources were known to the Indus Valley economy they seem to have commanded equal respect and human affection.

The Aryans who invaded India subsequently were said to have brought the horse as an animal of transport and their own cows as food resource. They seem to have worshipped the cow as it was their main food. That is how cow sacrifice among Rig Vedic Aryans acquired centrality. As the racial war between native Dravidians and migrant Aryans became intense the Dravidians lost the battle because of the fast-running horse and advanced war technology that the Aryans brought along with them. (The Muslim and British victories over India were traced to similar causes.) They construed all that was theirs as great and all that the Dravidians loved as ugly and devilish. The biggest sufferer of White racism in the world was all that was black, whether humans or animals. In India in the Hitlerite imagination of Aryan racial superiority black human beings and lovable black animals like the buffalo suffered enormous losses of identity. As part of this Aryan arrogance the buffalo, which was the same beautiful black colour as the Dravidians, began to be held in contempt. The cow, by and large a white-skinned animal, became respectable, as the Aryan white skin became respectable and beautiful.

and beautiful.

The cow's flesh was favoured by Aryans as it had also become the most desired *yajna pashu* (sacrificial animal) as many of our historians have already recorded. Sanskrit literature also does not have any evidence about the use of the buffalo (*mohishi*) in yajna sacrifice. Regarding cow sacrifice there is a lot of evidence. The main reason why cows were seen as ritually acceptable animals, in the beginning for sacrifice and later for worship, is that it suited the Aryan racist taste in terms of colour.

Thus, the Indian Aryans extended their racism not only to human beings by dividing them into castes (in our society that all Sudras, Chandalas and Adivasis have Dravidian origins is well known) but extended it to animals because of which the black buffalo never acquired a spiritual place in brahminic Hindu mythology.

The BJP, though it is not asking for similar protection for Brahmins as it would look ridiculous in a democracy, nevertheless keeps up the Aryan brahminic demand that the cow must be protected. Interestingly while at Nagpura black Dravidian, Bangaru Laxman, was chairing the meeting, the brahminic demand for cow protection without including the buffalo was passed as a resolution. Can Laxman tell the Dalits of India why the cow should be protected and not the buffalo?

Mid-Day, 4 October 2003

32

Hinduism and Capitalist Ethics

The Kumbh Mela in Uttar Pradesh is a Hindu affair. But the way a feeling of mass hysteria has been created around it and the political and superstitious vulgarity that operates around it must make even the most conservative Hindu sit up and think. What signal does the presenting of such practices as spirituality send about the Indian nationstate to the comity of nations? Though such melas take place once every 12 years, this time the hype has taken an uglier turn because of the rule of the BJP at the Centre and in UP. The Sangh Parivar forces are consciously mobilizing the Indian illiterate masses by reinforcing the 'belief system' that operates among them. The gathering of such masses is being

presented as a support base for the agenda of Ram temple construction that the Parivar is going to force on the nation.

Uttar Pradesh, governed by the BJP with the backing of the Centre, shows that the Hindu patriarchal state in the BJP vision functions like the 'march of God on earth'—not in a Hegelian progressive nationalist mode but in that of Kautilyan aggrandisement. The UP government has banned the elegant capitalist kind of competitive expression of the female self in the form of beauty contests, but is fully supporting the totally naked parades of sadhus in the name of Hindu spirituality. The media exhibits this male nakedness as if it is a divine dispensation that needs to be worshipped.

The patriarchal positivism towards naked male spirituality and its opposition to naked female spirituality was made clear when the UP police forcefully removed a Mexican woman who attempted to bathe naked. The spiritual politics of the body is being markedly constructed within the whole process of mystifying the state and civil society. This belief-centred patriarchal medievalism is being projected as the spiritualistic essence of the Indian (read Hindu) nationstate that the Hindutva school of intellectuals operating inside the state structure—particularly the media—are trying to construct.

This mode of hype for the Kumbh Mela has an inner dimension of competition with the annual mobilization of Muslim believers to Mecca, which also results in stampedes. The difference between the Mecca gathering of the faithful and the Kumbh Mela is that the Mecca gathering takes place in absolute non-political mode. But that kind of medieval consciousness has its own negation of capitalist development in the Islamic states governed by fundamentalists.

The Hindutva forces are also trying to compete with the *jihad* mode of fundamentalism by building up a Hindu fundamentalist mind that can withstand any hardships in the process of cementing the belief-based, but not knowledgebased, civil society. Such medieval fundamentalist consciousness negates the development of the capitalist ethic that needs to be built around reason.

Hinduism of the RSS (Kumbh Mela is part of that) mode and Islam of the jihad mode squarely stand in opposition to capitalist economic growth which is an essential ingredient of the modern nationstate. In Hindu India where the consciousness of the Kumbh type—which involves self-torture—is predominant, the unfettered growth of productive capital is not possible. That is why the real

competition to build a powerful capitalistic competitive civil society and state operates only among the societies governed by Christian and Buddhist civil societal ethics. In both these social systems the state is placed above religion quite categorically. Any spiritual negation of political democracy and reason-centred social life is not allowed. As such spiritual medievalism goes against the process of building up a modern civil society and state. A social environment conducive to the growth of capital will have to be provided by a positive religious ethic and a reasonably modern approach to life. Religion per se is not antithetical to modernity, but superstitious cult consciousness definitely negates it.

Both Japan and China, because of their Buddhist knowledgebased civil societal spiritual ethic, are competing with the Christian capitalism of the West. Perhaps in this century China and Japan will overtake many European countries in building up capital assets. Buddhism and Christianity have adapted themselves to the capitalistic ethic very well. But Islam and Hinduism have no inclination to transform themselves to support the required mode of production in the economic realm. On the contrary, they have a tendency to hold production back by ethically internalizing the indignity of labour and medieval superstitions. In Hinduism, the sadhus—naked or semi-naked—do not have positive interaction with the productive masses but rather establish a close nexus with criminal politicians. Islamic spiritual agencies, too, have this tendency. Such fundamentalist forces stand opposed to the capitalist ethic that requires a conscious promotion of the ‘work is worship’ culture. The socialist human equality must emerge from a consciousness which is based on the dignity of labour that builds up around the capitalist ethic, where the right to compete with each other is guaranteed. In the Hindu ethic, this process does not find any place at all. In the Islamic ethic, though it has a place; it is not constantly engaged with. Hence reform in both religions either gets nipped in the bud or is not allowed to change the basic structure of the static spiritual ethic. The productive ethic, therefore, is rather weak in both Hindu and Islamic societies.

The RSS claim that all sciences have a Hindu origin makes a mockery of the truth. A society that hangs on to medieval midnight cold-water baths and leads naked and semi-naked lives without protecting the body even in biting winter, where the body and mind become frozen and do not function, cannot produce a powerful spiritual mind, leave alone a scientific one. One wishes that the contemporary Hindu mind would develop a scientific mechanism to overcome the earthquakes that the Hindu epicentre, Gujarat, faced while the *maha yajnas*

were on at Kumbh Mela, without any Western scientific help. The RSS kind of organizations cannot help to overcome such disasters. Only constant enquiry will help to acquire the necessary knowledge of science to overcome such problems. Organizing yajnas does not help the growth of science.

Though all religions took their shape long ago, they have gone on reformulating themselves. Spiritual belief and knowledge were first separated with the emergence of Buddhism as a religion. Buddhism transformed its belief system into knowledge before Socrates formulated his thesis 'knowledge is virtue'. By the time the Buddha institutionalized the knowledge-centred sanghas, the belief system had become strongly rooted in superstition. The knowledge system on the other hand, tried to free humans from such belief-centred superstitions and refrained the human consciousness so that the human mind could raise rational questions in both material and spiritual realms.

Hinduism as a religion never allowed that kind of transformative experiment within itself. As a result, ancient and medieval practices continue to exist in Hinduism. The medievalism that we see today do not face opposition from the so-called Hindu religious rulers of today. This will surely have a bearing on our future. The BJP as a Hindu party could have taken a decision not to allow naked patriarchal parades and vulgar displays of wealth by the sadhus and sants, thereby presenting itself as a party that could impose self-discipline. But it chose to allow the vulgarity of naked parades, ganja-smoking and so on. It appears that such things are being organized by cellular phone-wielding Parivar organizers themselves. The BJP could have stopped all this at least to present itself as party that is capable of building Hindu India with a difference. A ruling class that cannot reform a religion deep-rooted in cults and superstitions cannot reform any part of a civil society that suffers from all sorts of medieval practices.

One is also baffled at the visit of Sonia Gandhi to this medieval *mela.* The Congress that has a history of Nehruvian rationalistic ethics is also getting drawn into this medievalist vortex. It might be doing so with the hope of getting some Hindu votes and seats. But tragically it finds itself in severe contradiction of the capitalist ethic that the nation's economy is hoping to develop.

Deccan Chronicle, 6 February 2001

33

The Buddha Smiles in Afghanistan

The brutal attack by the Taliban on the historic statues of Gautama Buddha in Afghanistan is condemnable. The Buddha established a great liberative philosophy as far back as the 6th century B.C.E. and he himself was never for worshipping idols. The Buddha, who stood for non-violence, simply smiles at such acts. The attacks on his statues, hopefully, will bring back the teachings of the Buddha into a fresh global discourse. The first major anti-idol worship preacher in the world was Isaiah of Israel (around 850 B.C.E.) and the second was the Buddha himself. The third was Jesus and the fourth was Mohammed, with whose preachings Islam came to be established.

All over Asia, Buddha statues were carved out in caves and viharas not for worship but as historical symbols around which his preaching was carried to the illiterate masses. When Buddhism began to spread during the regime of Ashoka, there was no book-based spiritual worship. This became popular only after the Bible was constructed as a spiritual text. The Bible was woven into one book, putting together several historical events that occurred in and around Israel over a period of centuries before and after the birth of Christ. Unlike the Bible, the Quran is a text narrated by Muhammad as the word of Allah. The Muslims became more book-centred than even Christians who have a tradition of installing statues of Christ and Mary in the churches. The ignorance of the Taliban regarding history is amazing. They think that all statues in the world were made only to be used as idols for worship, which is not at all true. The statues of the Buddha are respected in all parts of the world going beyond the boundaries of religion. He has become the most respectable historical symbol of classical civilization and culture. In the spiritual realm he is a precursor of Christ and Mohammed and in the philosophical realm he is the precursor of Socrates, Plato and Confucius. In the spiritual realm he is the ancient bridge between tribal totemism and organized religion and in the political realm a bridge between tribal republicanism and Aristotelian polity. He is the builder of egalitarian (sangha) society. The Taliban should know that his image and teachings are not confined to the present Buddhist religion nor to Indian or Asian boundaries. His is the great legacy of non-violence.

Statues such as those in the Bamiyan region of Afghanistan have acquired the status of historical monuments as they were carved out about 2,000 years ago. Islam has a tradition of establishing monuments by constructing mosques and palaces or structures such as the Taj Mahal or the Charminar. When the RSS pulled down the Babri Masjid, which had acquired the status of a historical

pulled down the Babri Masjid, which had acquired the status of a historical monument, the whole world condemned it. Now a similar vandalism is being indulged in by the Taliban. Religious bigots, whether Islamic or Hindu, should know the value of historical monuments. A historical monument is a symbol of civilization but not a representative of a particular religion.

It appears that all religious fundamentalists lack a concept of history. They do not seem to understand the fact that history is different from belief. Assuming that Babar did not know history and destroyed a Ram temple (if one existed there), we must understand him because there was no notion of 'monument' at that time. But L. K. Advani is supposed to know the difference between a monument and a mosque as he is a modern man. If Mohammed Ghazni did not know history and destroyed Somnath we should understand it, but Mullah Mohammed Omar's not knowing history is inexcusable. Medievalism and modernity are differentiated primarily by the knowledge of history. In history, a written document or text after 30 years acquires the status of a public document and hence it becomes archival material. Similarly a structure that survives a hundred years and more acquires the status of a monument. The Taliban and the RSS/VHP have proved to be operating from the same ground of ignorance of the difference between faith and history, between a historical monument and a mosque or a statue. The attack on the statues of such a great historical (not mythological) figure such as the Buddha would have two implications for the world. One, Buddhism, which is the biggest religion in the world, may turn anti-Islamic. Hitherto non-existing tensions between Buddhism and Islam may be formed. Second, Buddhism, which never was a communal religion, might take a communal posture. Bigoted acts by a small communal sect within any religion put that entire religion in a negative light before the global community. When the Babri Masjid was destroyed by the RSS/VHP operating from within Hinduism, it put the entire religion to test. The present act of the Taliban will put all of Islam also to the test. The political mileage gained out of such destruction is a momentary one.

The people of the world in the context of globalization have a choice between secularist modernity and anti-developmental fundamentalist medievalism. It is a situation of a war of nerves, not only in India, but at the global level, between secularism and communalism. The West, which has evolved a secular modernist development process, living within the broad contours of religion, is advancing very fast. The East, particularly the subcontinent, is likely to get caught in the vortex of fundamentalist wars, which hamper all development. The destruction of the Babri Masjid and the Buddha statues are cases in point.

Islam which brought about several reforms in human life, particularly in its first 500 years, will move backwards if it allows Talibanlike forces to emerge. The Taliban should know that Asia became a continent of great religions because of the initial steps of the Buddha. Islam owes the Buddha as much as Hinduism and Christianity do.

The Shahi Imam of the Jama Masjid, Syed Ahmed Bukhari, very surprisingly supported the Taliban attack on the Buddhas in Afghanistan. He did so in the view that it was a retaliatory act against the Hindu communal agenda being set by the Hindutva forces in India. Such a wrong understanding is rooted in the fact that Buddhism is being projected by the Hindutva forces as part of Hinduism. Unfortunately, for many Muslim scholars Indian history starts only with the establishment of Muslim kingdoms. For them, pre-Islamic India is mono-Hinduistic. In fact, it is the Muslim writers who named India Hindustan. They never understood that brahminic Hinduism and Buddhism were two major contending religions before the Muslim kingdoms were established in India. One version is that the attacks of Hinduism against Buddhism weakened Buddhism before Islam took shape in India. There is a serious contention of many historians that many Hindu temples (which have by now become monuments in their own historical right) are restructured Buddha-Jain viharas.

Ambedkar, who revived Buddhism and transformed it in India into a religion of Dalits, had held both brahminic Hindus and bigoted Muslims responsible for the elimination of Buddhism from India. The Taliban does not seem to realize that Buddhism today is a religion of the poorest of the poor in India. The RSS/VHP do not treat the Buddha with the same spiritual reverence as they treat a mythological figure like Rama. For example, the Hindutva-wadis will not accept that all non-Muslims, non-Christians, non-Sikhs and non-Parsis should be declared Buddhists but not Hindus. Such a proposal does not go against the Indian nationhood, as the Buddha is the greatest ancient Indian. Yet the Buddha would not be acceptable to them. Such is the difference between Hinduism and Buddhism. How and why should the Buddha become a retaliatory target for the Taliban?

Afghanistan has been suffering from Talibanite fundamentalism for quite some time, so it is not surprising that it does not show the signs of a mature nation. No nation can enter into a path of development if it does not produce thinkers who can understand the positive linkages of the ancient past and modern nationhood. The Buddha statues are a great heritage of all modern people of the world. The

The Buddha statues are a great heritage of all modern people of the world. The Taliban must preserve them with respect. Let the Muslim world intervene and stop such vandalism in the interests of global peace.

The Hindu, 13 March 2001

PART 8
On Globalization

34

Cultural Globalization

In the realm of economic life, globalization has offered expanded and varied opportunities for the rich and made the poor poorer. In India, where caste occupations remain the source of survival for lower caste communities, globalization has killed many such trades and displaced traditional labour from the fields, creating nightmarish conditions for the poor. DalitBahujan movements have to grapple with this situation and resist economic globalization.

In the cultural realm, globalization seems to have opened up a new channel of hope for the historically suppressed masses. Modern sociological studies have shown how brahminic notions of purity and pollution in relation to ritual-culture, food habits and dress code have kept the majority of India's masses in cultural slavery. Productive culture was defined as impure and the ritual-consumerist culture constructed as pure and great. Even the concept of knowledge was defined in relation to a consumerist culture; while productive knowledge was not considered knowledge. Knowledge was essentially seen as the ability to read the classical Sanskritic texts. The day-to-day activities of producing food, domesticating animals, constructing irrigation systems and building technologies were considered unworthy in the realm of religion. The semi-scientific experiments of the common people were not even allowed to become part of textual knowledge.

Even Muslim rule and the cultural hegemony that Islamic thought established in the late medieval and early modern periods did not change the brahminic notions of culture. Though Islamic thought did not see religion and productive activity as antagonistic, Muslim scholars never thought of changing the cultural relations of the people as they too became brahminized in many ways. Muslim scholarship did not try to study the productive culture of the DalitBahujans. The real change came after the Christian missionaries began interacting with India's productive masses. The missionaries, instead of condemning the food habits, dress code and ritual practices of these masses, began seeing them as part of the divine process

ritual practices of these masses, began seeing them as part of the divine process. They lived with them, ate their food and adopted their dress code in order to give them cultural confidence. The practices of William Carey and Robert de' Nobili are good examples. Scholars such as Verrier Elwin and Christoph von Fürer Haimendorf built integrative values among the Adivasis as well. The productive masses had been denied the right to read and write, as these skills were considered divine. A major blow to casteism was the opening up of schools for all. The missionaries opened schools for the children of those Jyotirao Phule called Sudras and Ati-Sudras. Some educated DalitBahujan youth began to understand the commonness between Western culture and their own. For the first time, the productive masses began to feel that their culture had globally respectable aspects.

During the nationalist campaign and more so in the post-Independence reconstruction of the cultural realm, Brahminism regained the ground it had lost during the colonial period. The productive masses again felt insecure in the cultural sphere. The recent globalization process has re-opened channels for the integration of Indian productive mass culture with global culture. This gave enormous confidence to the intellectuals who began organizing anti-brahminic campaigns. It is well known that education is the major instrument for upgrading people's culture, but, as we have seen, education itself was denied to the productive masses before the colonial administration opened that channel for them. Phule, among the first to be educated in an English-medium school, revolted against inwardlooking Hindu culture.

Language and religion are the two essential channels for culturally assimilating diversified social groups. The globalization of Indian education has been done with the expansion of English-medium schools. The approach of providing regional language education for the poor and English for the rich had stalled the process of cultural exchange between the Indian masses' un-Hindu culture and Western cultures. Yet, English is more available to the masses now than Sanskrit in the ancient period, and Urdu and Persian in medieval times.

It appears that the first national language with which the children of all sections came in contact was English. It came without any spiritual tags. The DalitBahujan children who came in touch with the language acquired skills to learn global knowledge and skills. They too could communicate with a global audience. Though over a period of time even English became the social capital of the upper castes, quite a large number of people coming from the oppressed castes learnt it and came in touch with the world's egalitarian knowledge

systems. There is a world of difference between persons from historically educated castes learning English and historically suppressed communities learning the language and reaching out to the knowledge of the West. For a Brahmin scholar, for example, Western culture that came through English was a negation of his own inwardlooking culture—whether the culture of food and drink or the spiritual culture of worship of an inwardlooking nature. For a DalitBahujan who learns English and adopts the Western culture, there are many things in it that are common with his/her own 'condemned culture' back home. Eating on a dining table with spoons and forks may appear new but there is a lot in common between Western foods and those of the DalitBahujans.

A vegetarian Brahmin/Baniya has to make an extra effort to become Westernized and does this moreover at the cost of being socially ostracized. For DalitBahujans there is no such need. The question of ostracism also does not arise because there is no ban on foods such as pork. When B. R. Ambedkar went to New York for education he did not have to make promises to his parents or relatives of preserving his food culture like Gandhi did. He could eat whatever was on his table with ease. Which culture is Indian? Ambedkar's or Gandhi's?

Unlike Gandhi and Nehru, Ambedkar wore a suit throughout his life without facing any problems from his community. Gandhi had to struggle a lot to de-Westernize himself. Nehru, for all his socialist ideas and rational thinking, wore a thread across his chest under his sherwani. Yet, Ambedkar was not an accepted Hindu. Many brahminic writers who criticized Ambedkar for getting Westernized so quickly and praised Gandhi for adopting Indian simplicity are now competing to adopt Western culture. Many such critics of Ambedkar wear suits on many occasions. They are not dressed in Gandhian attire at all. Some BJP ministers are good cases in point. Those who struggle to become Westernized want to preserve Indian culture only with regard to women's dress and make-up code. Who is afraid of cultural globalization then? There is a brahminic patriarchal morality in opposing cultural globalization.

Cultural globalization negates the brahminic myth of purity and pollution and liberates the DalitBahujans in several ways. The first and foremost liberation takes place with the simple fact that what is condemned at home becomes, in a globalized culture, a positive commodity for sale. Their condemned self becomes respectable. The danger lies, rather, in economic globalization.

The Hindu, 22 February 2003

35

Dalits and Globalization

At a time when they are hopeful of living a new life, the Dalits are being threatened by the new development of advanced capitalism, the process of globalization. The world is drawn into the unprecedented consumerism of the middle and upper middle classes with the advent of the market economy that has begun to destroy the existential basis of the poverty-ridden masses.

The middle and upper middle classes of India are drawn into the globalization process and their consumerism matches that of their counterparts in advanced capitalist countries. This has dealt a cultural shock to the SCs, STs and OBCs. The socioeconomic and cultural forces of the market that came into operation in the early 1990s have produced adverse effects on the DalitBahujan masses, compounded by the fact that the agrarian economy has not torn asunder the old feudal relationships and the market is dumping goods and commodities created by advanced capitalism on social groups that are tied up with caste and feudal structures. The market is tearing apart the lives of the labouring DalitBahujans as they are unable to cope with growing aspirations on the one hand, and increasing deprivation on the other.

Agrarian relations have not shown marked changes in terms of land-human relationships and the wage system. The vast majority of the SCs, STs and OBCs who come within the agrarian labour economy, live below the poverty line. The cultivation of cash crops such as fish, prawn and flower production, imposed upon them to feed the global markets, is showing a trend of labour displacement that has been having tremendous impact on the living conditions of these sections in villages.

The problem has been complicated by the state withdrawing from the welfare sector. The state, even after the CPI and the CPI(M) have become part of the ruling elite, has not withdrawn from liberalization and privatization. The economy is geared to meet the consumerist aspirations of the employed, the business and other classes, and the poor are getting pauperized more and more. While urban roads are full of cars and two-wheelers and middle class and the upper class households are full of durable, Western fashion and consumer goods, the children from a majority of SC, ST and OBC families are Unable even to to go to school or to get enough food to eat.

Such vast differences in lifestyles may engender various forms of terrorism. As globalization increases, the crime rate is also likely to rise. The irresponsible rich and middle classes do not think of containing their inhuman consumerism and also want to have total safety for their lives and property at the cost of the state. What will happen if the state also withdraws from that responsibility? The social conditions which these lifestyles are creating may in fact destroy the safety and security valves that the state has put in place. These forces cannot demand the withdrawal of the state from one responsibility and ask it to remain active in another area. Even if the state does that for its own class interests, it will lose legitimacy among the vast masses. The protagonists of citizens' rights within the framework of liberalization cannot argue for two modes of citizenship—the consumerist and the dispossessed.

The suicide rate among SCs, STs and OBCs in the villages is increasing. The guarantee of employment in all spheres of life that was available in the pre-globalization period no longer exists and the threat of starvation hanging over Dalits is increasing. Unfortunately, many commentators have not noted the nexus bauveen the fast-deteriorating socioeconomic conditions of the DalitBahujans and globalization.

Gail Omvedt has argued that the DalitBahujan masses might also improve their lot by getting some space in the market economy. Her thesis is based on the assumption that globalization opens up new spaces. It is true that in the wake of the release of the new market forces semi-educated DalitBahujan youth are getting (some have already got) low-paid jobs as private car drivers: some men and women get jobs in the expanding retail and other service sectors. But it is not true that they can get any entrepreneurial space. There has been quite a bit of diversification in services but most of these new services have been controlled by the upper castes who have sufficient experience in handling market mechanisms. The newly-educated SCs, STs and OBCs could not really capture any substantial space. Since each market structure survives on market-related social connections, the DalitBahujan youth who got into such spaces are also not in a position to withstand market tensions. Because of castecentred market relations, DalitBahujans are unable to survive in entrepreneurial spheres where capital plays the key role and can find a little space only in those state and private sector jobs that involve only labour (mental and physical).

Omvedt and those who are attempting to establish a link between globalization and DalitBahujan liberation do not seem to realize that there is a close nexus

and DalitBahujan liberation do not seem to realize that there is a close nexus between capital and caste. In a country where caste, but not class, relations play the role of social capital, there is no way that Dalit-Babujans can survive in the competitive capital market. The globalized market is more competitive than the classical capital market that Marx analysed. In this reality, the position of DalitBahujans is worse than that of the proletariat in Western societies in different phases of capitalism. Unless there is social and capital security, they cannot survive in the market system. We have now realized that not even the CPI and the CPI(M) can stall state withdrawal from social security—leave alone market security.

In the face of receding social security and a failing Public Distribution System, displacement of traditional labour in the agrarian economy and privatization of jobs, the DalitBahujans will encounter a major threat to their survival. The moment the Fifth Pay Commission salaries are paid, the gap between the assured salaried employees and the unemployed and underemployed will increase several-fold again. The prices are already rising enormously and house rents will go up in urban and semi-urban areas. The DalitBahujans will get crushed between the increasing price structure and growing unemployment and underemployment and the market itself will begin to play the role of armed squads against the masses. The DalitBahujans are facing the problem of globalized pollution as well. The urban and semi-urban centres have .become the dumping grounds for obsolete technology and pollutant wastage. Their impact would be more on the lower castes who live in slums. Bourgeois economists tell us that globalization was and is an inevitable process. But globalization of the present type is not an operation of the ‘invisible hand’ but the result of the construction of the global middle and upper middle classes. Its survival lies in the consumerist culture of these classes. Those who do not have access to it will have to live in despair.

One will have to find remedies within the Dalit-Buddhist tradition. The Buddhist sangha was anti-consumerist and Ambedkarite state socialism was a third alternative to capitalism and socialism where state regulations play only an interventionist, and not ownership, role. The Ambedkarite interventionism, in which there is no compromise with individual aggrandizement, will have controls on consumerism, assigning capitalist dignity (as against casteist indignity) to labour and it would also shift the emphasis on social values in the market system itself.

The Hindu notions of life, market and education treat all manual labour-

processes as undignified, and globalization and computerization are proving detrimental to the DalitBahujan social forces because as a result their native labour-centred skills find no market value. There is a feeling that labouring human beings themselves are redundant and that feeling destroys the moral and philosophical fibre of society. Imposition of global technologies that require minimum human labour power will prove counter-productive in countries where a lot of human energy is available.

In this situation India has to evolve mechanisms that will resolve the contradiction between abundantly available human labour and imposed technologies. Globalization is posing more problems to humanity in the Third World than it seeks to solve. The Dalits have to evolve a programme to contain and fight the effects of globalization. Their nature-friendly life, combined with modern education, will help them acquire the potential to construct the alternatives for checkmating globalization. Let us not forget what the Buddha repeatedly told us: 'Consumerism and "*soma* sangha" are antagonistic to each other.' Globalization is making us consumerist beasts. Let us reject it and return to our humanitarian roots.

The Hindu, 17 November 1997

36

Death Wish?

The one-dimensional spell of globalization has unleashed its fury at the grassroot level in India. Of all the Third World countries, India has one of the biggest markets for global commodities. There are also central and state governments who are much too willing to put their entire market at the feet of multinational companies. Globalization suits the **BJP/NDA** regime since it is motivated to privatize the huge properties that the Indian state has built during the mixed economy phase. The **BJP** strongly opposes all modes of socialistic, communitarian or state-owned property structures.

Upper caste Hindu economic thought believes in a Kautilyan state, which abhors any welfarism. This mode fits into the globalized capitalist model that the state should not entertain any welfare activity and all modes of productive activity should be handled at the family or corporate level. This suits the newly emerging 'Jet-brahminic' private economy.

The middle class that is propped up by Hindutva ideas of the *bhadralok* (educated middle and upper classes, generally upper caste) and emerging civil societal relationships is evolving a new ethic of Hindu spiritualism and Western consumerism as mutually accommodative processes. In this affluence, the traditional caste-bound artisans have no option but to commit mass suicide. In their invisible deaths, they all leave an unwritten dying declaration that 'our mass suicides are for the prosperity of the rich at the other end of society' lest their commitment to nationalism becomes suspect.

After the spate of suicides of weavers in Andhra Pradesh, several artisan groups including goldsmiths, blacksmiths, potters, toddy-tappers and shepherds are getting pushed into this new deathtrap. One goldsmith family of five persons committed mass suicide in Visakhapatnam last year. Several cases have been reported from drought-stricken, debt-ridden areas. And this is not specific to Andhra. The artisan and agrarian communities have fallen into this deathtrap in almost all states.

In Andhra, the Padmashalis of Sircilla and Dubbaka have been trapped in this mess as the sari and grey cloth market has collapsed. In the face of the new styles and material, the traditional dress code seems to be fast losing its value. The powerloom pushed the handloom workers into urban slums and made them dependent on the market. Shampoo has replaced the free-of-cost shikakai (nut soap), the brush and toothpaste have replaced the free-of-cost neem stick that acts like a toothbrush, costly bathing soaps have replaced cheap rice powder, expensive skin creams have replaced homemade turmeric-based traditional cosmetics. An artisan family that was living in a 'half-kind' and 'half-cash' economy has now been trapped by the money market. They have no source of generating money in a market where their products are dying.

Not only weavers but also a whole range of artisans like potters are being displaced from their occupations without any viable alternative livelihood. The BJP-led government cares little for India's multi-caste economy. We have a 'soft state' when it comes to allowing the globalization agenda of the Euro-American states since this agenda suits the kind of 'Brahmin-Bania' economy the BJP wants to build through the process of disinvestment. That is why the disinvestment ministry has been handed over to Arun Shourie who is hellbent on dismantling the reservation system with privatization.

All the trade agreements between India and the Euro-American countries are

All the trade agreements between India and the Euro-American countries are aimed at augmenting the top business class, which is composed of upper castes. The Dalits, OBCs and tribals have no share in the industrial capital. In this globalized hi-tech economy, the artisan communities have been pushed to the wall. Their tragedy is deliberate, organized and invisible.

The goldsmith's skills in ornament-making have no value in the globalized market. The earthen pots of the Indian potters have no buyers. In every artisanal market, the MNCs have brought in commodities which have a different face value. Assuming that the traditional artisanal production is 'un-Hindu', the Arun Shourie brand of economists do not care two hoots. What is so 'Hindu' or Indian about the globalized commodities being produced by NRI investors in India? Among the educated upper caste people of India, what nationalist respect is there for the commodities produced by the artisans of India? Did the BJP, RSS and VHP inculcate any nationalist culture in the consumption market? Since they came to power, the use of global commodities among the upper caste consumers has increased. Will the Hindutva brigade take responsibility for the mass suffering of the artisans post-liberalization?

Why are the artisans committing suicide with such regularity? Look at the irony of the vocal classes who talk of Indian *sanskriti.* They are highly westernized with English (missionary school) education and are comfortable with all kinds of imported commodities. But the majority of Indians are still rooted in classical skills; that they are caught in the cobweb of the superimposed market with the obsolete skills that they have learnt from generation to generation is because of the historical trap of the caste culture. They are literate (or illiterate) in their own mother tongue. But they are not allowed entry into English education which is an essential ingredient of globalization. India stands at the crossroads of a *sissadeshi* (buy Indian goods) theory and *videshi* (foreign) market under Hindutva. Enthusiastic state governments like that of Andhra have been drawn into the vortex of World Bank theories, promising an illusory *swarnadhara* (stream of gold), while the ghosts of the starving and dead artisans sing the melancholic songs from *smashanandhra* (dead Andhra). Both appear to be true.

The increasing number of imported and Indian cars on our roads and the suicides of starving artisans speak for two different nations at the same time. Any hi-tech administration in a semi-capitalist country still steeped in backwardness rings the deathknell of 'backward' regions and 'backward' peoples. It increases the wealth of the icecream-eating class/castes. Is this suffering, the suicides, the marginalization, all part of the development of Hindu nationalism? E-commerce

can deliver imported gadgets to the doorsteps of the credit-card holding class. But it cannot deliver rice to the starving masses, as they do not even have soiled notes to pay for it. E-governance can sanction the projects of MNC construction companies for high profit, but it does not enhance the efficiency of the public distribution system. Not that the Indian godowns lack grain, but the truth is that the World Bank locks do not allow the grain to be distributed to the poor.

If the weavers, farmers, goldsmiths, blacksmiths, potters, textile designers, handloom craftsmen choose to die by feeding pesticides to their whole families, why is it that the fast-food society never even stirs? The upper caste Hindu economic theory also concurs with the ancient theory that if the poor get used to doles they become lazy. Hence, subsidies are treated as a 'socialist evil'. Even those who starve and work must buy rice or jowar but all the nationalized banks must give low interest loans to car-making companies and car-buying individuals since that is the wage for their hard work in driving the Indian economy into a debt-trap.

Hindustan Times, 6 February 2002

PART 9
On Education

37

A Lesson from African English

My first-ever foreign trip was to South Africa in September 2001. I was in the team that went to the UN Conference on Racism in

Durban. Till then my notion of English was that it was the language

of highly educated people, but during the Durban visit I realized that

even a new and ‘foreign’ language can become popular if only the

state and civil society take it to the people.

In India, English is spoken only by the socalled highly educated class. We get a feeding that it is their language. With the passage of

time, this view has been further cemented. Now English has acquired the notoriety of being a brahminical language, and consequently even sensible persons are coming to view it as antinational.

My visit to South Africa made me realize that English could become

not only a Black, but also a Black nationalist, language. Not only

that, even in a colonial context it can become a mass language.

Colonial Britain went to Africa with the Bible and English and these were passed onto a morally stronger tribal people. African tribal

nationalism emerged not only as authentic, inbuilt and indigenous

but it also became more liberated under the leadership of Englishspeaking and Bible-reading leaders like Nelson Mandela. Mandela used the Bible and

Marxism as liberative philosophies and far excelled any of the nationalist leaders of the modern world in acquiring moral stature. In the hands of African Blacks, English as a language and the Bible as a spiritual book turned out to be the weapons of the weak. The racist colonial British imposed English and the Bible to exploit people, but these two weapons boomeranged on the

colonial masters themselves. The weak and controlled tribal masses

learnt the language of the oppressor and understood the abstract idea

of God through his book.

The journey to Johannesburg from Mumbai took nine hours. Ours was a team of about 100 people in one flight. It was a real group of

singing and dancing Dalits with *dappu*, a musical instrument. Many of them had boarded an aircraft for the first time in their life. Many

had ridden on the backs of buffaloes and oxen but none had ever

flown in a plane. But all of them were trained in a two-day workshop

on in-flight behaviour and good air manners. For the first time in our

nation's history so many untouchables had flown overseas to meet

with similar underprivileged Blacks in a Black nation, and to see a

nation of people much darker than the Dalit-Bahujans, having a tremendous knowledge and a self-confidence to excel. It was a time to trade off Dalit Nationalism with Black Nationalism.

Flying in the cozy comfort of the South African Airbus with trained Black air hostesses speaking fluent English, was a pleasure.

There was only one White male attendant to assist the Black crew.

The service and efficiency of those Black women, in comparison

with the efficiency of other airlines, was amazing, as was the skill,

efficiency, good communication and confidence with which they handled the people aboard. At Johannesburg airport we saw all the immigration desks being staffed by Black men and women with a few White persons. Of course, there were more women than men. Their English was impeccable. Their average efficiency at verifying and returning documents was far faster and more accurate than that of Air India staff. In fact, they were in certain respects far more efficient than the staff of Western airlines.

The journey from Johannesburg to Durban takes one hour by plane. Unlike in India and the USA, even on internal flights South African Airlines serves drinks. There were many Blacks on the flight that we took to Durban. Obviously, they were middle class people and bureaucrats. Though many had their drinks, we did not see any Black person misbehaving on the flight. There was no trace of any of the Black misdemeanour I had read about time and again.

The South African Blacks appear to be emerging as a worthy ruling class within a short span of attaining their independence. The English they acquired, though forced on them by their racist colonial masters, has given them unintended results. What I saw at Durban was something pleasantly surprising. The whole UN Conference registration, accommodation and other arrangements—particularly that for the non-governmental organizations—were looked after by the Blacks themselves. The whole computer-related work was handled by Black women and men. The whole cultural setting reflected

by Black women and men. The whole cultural setting reflected

Black aesthetics in which nature and culture fuse together. From

President Thabo Mbeki to the lowest peon everyone danced on the

same stage with the least regard to hierarchy.

The most interesting thing was that almost all the South African Blacks who showed up at the conference knew English. The peon,

watch and ward staff, traffic cops on the roads and room attendants in

the hotels, all of them spoke English with an African accent.

The South Africans have turned English into a Black language.

English has become a different language in their socio-cultural context: it communicates globally but carries a lot of Africanness with it.

Many African idioms with productive cultural connotations have become part of the language. I did not see as many beggars as we see in India, though there were a few. Here and there on the footpaths of

the neatly maintained Durban roads, begging men and women sat

with placards reading ‘Give Money for Food’ hanging from their

necks. Unlike the Indian beggars they did not shout or pester anybody. If you asked something they explained with a method in their madness and that too in their Black English. Not that Indian beggars

have no method in their madness. Indian begging has an institutionalized idiocy. Here the priest begs and the devotee begs as if God created begging as an institution along with their being. At least in

Durban I found only the lame, chronically sick and also uncared-for

old people begging. Whether this was because the South African

government had driven away able-bodied beggars to make the city

presentable for the delegates of the UN conference, one cannot say.

But it is unlikely that it could plant only Englishspeaking beggars

here and there and remove the rest. The small vendors on Durban

beach were also communicating in English. While marketing their

products they communicated a cultural idiom too.

I am not suggesting that this is likely to be true of the whole of rural South Africa. Many rural South Africans must be struggling with

their own tribal languages. With the growing popularity of English

and with the lower middle and working classes readily adopting the

language, the tribes that do not know English must be feeling miserable. But perhaps a few decades from now, all South Africans will be able to communicate in English. That seems to be the national

direction.

Does that transplant the whole of British culture there? Not at all.

Even if all of South Africa forgets its native languages and adopts

English as its national language, the identity of its culture remains.

Language alone is not the preserver or propagator of culture. As culture remains in caste, in people's relation to land and labour in India, in South Africa too culture remains in their colour and in their land

and labour. In India the ruling castes and classes control English to

see that it does not become a mass language. But the South African

ruling classes seem to be willing to open it up. Within such a short

span of independence, there is a phenomenal displacement of

Whites in many sectors. I am told that within the last one decade the

Whites in many sectors. I am told that within the last one decade the

Johannesburg airport staff position has changed so rapidly that by

2001 about 60 percent Whites were displaced by Blacks.

And as I said earlier many Blacks working at the airport were quite efficient. This was possible because of English education

among the Blacks, who were tribals till the other day. This can become possible in India too.

Deccan Chronicle, 3 October 2003

38

Caste, Clinton and the IT Revolution

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu was impressed by US President Bill Clinton. According to Naidu, what was most

impressive about Clinton was that 'he himself regulated the air-conditioner during their private meeting and, at a public meeting, when some papers fell out of his hands, he picked them up himself.' Naidu

could not think of any Prime Minister or Chief Minister of this country doing the same sort of thing.

Forget Prime Ministers, even an ordinary officer does not do what Clinton did. This is because the dignity of labour has been pushed to

the lowest level in this country. Indian civil society and the state

apparatus have failed to institutionalize the notion of dignity of

labour. Even our schools hegemonize the brahminic value of indignity of labour and construct a notion of the superiority of brahminic life. Thus, those who 'interact' with tools, the soil, instruments of

production and services, are treated as 'inferior beings' and continue

to be described as Sudras and Chandalas.

Naidu and other politicians may talk about information technology (IT), but they have not evolved any agenda for deconstructing the brahminic mind that has negated the advancement of a positive

social ethic centred essentially on the notion of dignity of labour. As

along as this does not occupy the centre of our socio-political system,

the IT revolution will end up perpetuating the Brahmin-Bania islands of wealth that consider indignity of labour the central value of life. Thus, while talking about an IT-centric economy, one must first

de-brahminize our socioeconomic values quite thoroughly.

Clinton made three important points in his Hyderabad speech.

First, an IT-based economy should be targeted towards communities

and individuals. ‘I want to steer with you,’ he said. ‘But we cannot

forget the simple message that, no matter how much new technology

there is, the two things we must remain committed to are empowerment and community.’ His Bombay speech also referred to the empowering of castes and ethnic groups.

Indeed, India’s development process has left several castes and communities far behind the upper castes. When Clinton introduced a

small group of American industrialists to Indian industrialists at the

Hi-Tech City meeting, there was one Black woman industrialist

among them. But was there a Dalit or OBC or tribal industrialist

among the Indian team? I am sure there was none. This is precisely

why Clinton’s point about community-oriented development becomes important.

This takes us to the related issue of affirmative action to empower SCs, STs and

This takes us to the related issue of preferential treatment towards SCs, STs and OBCs in the disbursement of licences and granting of state subsides to help historically exploited communities create industrial assets. Why did the White House include a Black

woman industrialist on Clinton's team? This was to show the world

that development in the USA is oriented to improving the conditions

of all communities. Let us not forget the fact that the phenomenon

of Black industrialists emerged in the USA only because preferential

treatment to them was extended to the private sector. In this phase

of globalization, the Indian state, too, had no option but to follow the example of the USA.

The communists protested against the Clinton visit. But they should understand that opposing capitalism while living in casteism

does not make them respectable among the Indian proletariat, which

is made up of none other than Dalit-Bahujans. This is one of the reasons why the communists are marginal in electoral politics. The *swadeshi* group in the RSS found it necessary to welcome Clinton because he would have otherwise twisted the arm of the BJP government. Also, industrialists who fund RSS activities showed their class bias in wanting to shake hands with the US President. But the

swadeshi group, too, does not talk about extending the reservation

policy to the private sector. The fact is that such a demand would go

against their caste-class interest—private sector jobs remain the preserve of upper castes whose interests the Sangh Parivar represents and protects.

Second, Clinton seems to have realized that the socalled IT

revolution in India is being exploited to make the rich richer. Hitherto, Indian industry was 'Bania-ic' in nature—it was devoid of any social purpose and its sole aim was profit. Clinton's advisers seem to

have told him that the caste-class nexus in India has created a gap

between the rich and the poor at a level that no society in the West

has. It is no wonder that Clinton stated, ‘Millions of Indians are connected to the internet, but millions more are not connected to fresh drinking water.’

Indeed, the internet may connect the village upper caste rich to America, but it does not connect the poor Dalit families of the same

village to safe drinking water. The internet cannot eliminate untouchability and the caste carnages taking place around Bangalore— India’s Silicon Valley—and Hyderabad—or Cyberabad— for the

simple reason that the prevailing caste discrimination and advanced

technology co-exist conveniently.

American capital never knew a practice of making

gupta dhana (black money) a social virtue, but the Indian Bania market system

operationalized this process without any moral guilt. Though

Clinton used the phrase ‘as in America’ out of modesty, the socioeconomic inequalities within America are not at all comparable to those of India. He very rightly said, ‘So our challenge is to turn

the newest discoveries into the best weapons humanity has ever

had to fight poverty. In all the years of recorded history, we have

never had so many opportunities to fight poverty. And it is good

economics to do so.’

The roots of poverty in India lie in the caste system. To take one example, the billions of rupees that circulate in the socalled

temple economy do not benefit a single Dalit family at a time

when spiritualism has been operating in an inter-connected manner

with modern technology. Today, more computers are being used to

modernize the images of Hindu deities than for computing the

nature of caste-class inequalities and the number of atrocities taking place on Dalits and women.

Third, Clinton also reminded us that IT should be free of corruption, and that it should be combined with methods of verification.

Pointing to the driving licence that was issued to him to demonstrate

the efficiency of the Andhra administration, Clinton said that it had

been done without anyone verifying whether or not he could drive.

'This is not possible in America,' he said.

In India, caste and corruption are twins. Historically, the Brahmins were not only treated as *bhudevatas* (gods on earth), but even their corrupt practices were treated as divine virtues. Kautilya said in the *Arthashastra* that a Brahmin bureaucrat is like a fish in the sea— it is futile to verify whether or not it drinks water; so some castes are to be exempted from all punishment. If the caste system is not abolished, IT will perpetuate these maladies far more dangerously. Since liberalization will become rapid now, let Dalit-Bahujans get their

due share in private capital as well, otherwise the stability of Indian

capitalism itself may well be in danger.

The Hindustan Times, 2 April 2002

39

Through Books, Ships and Sea

Right in the middle of wars and the SARS epidemic across the world, I set out on a sort of global tour, beginning from mid-May of 2003.

Quite unusually, the Dalit diaspora organized the first ever Dalit International Conference at Vancouver, Canada. There had been such a conference in Malaysia two years ago, but by and large that went

unnoticed; When we were about to start, we were worried about SARS

and the political conditions in America after the Iraq War. We had to

change our route to Vancouver via Frankfurt, though it cost more.

The Vancouver conference made some significance declarations with regard to Dalit development. After I made my presentation on

May 16 on 'Ambedkar: The Fifth Prophet', I had not much work left

at the conference as most delegates did not seem interested in such

philosophical questions and were more focused on development and

diversity. Instead, I enjoyed my stay at Vancouver, a beautiful city at

the far end of the Northwest. From there, on an invitation from the

world-famous book-distributing ship *Logos II*, I went to San Diego via California. The flight to San Diego from Vancouver touched down at

California for a brief halt, giving me a feeling that it was landing not on land, but on water. I was told by my friend Sam Paul that the California airport was built on land reclaimed from the sea.

San Diego is one of the biggest port cities in America. Its atmosphere resembles that of Visakhapatnam. From the airport, we were driven to a ship standing anchored near the shores of San Diego beside the beautifully laid beach roads, where ships load and unload, stay and sail off. The ship gave one the impression of a continental hotel. The next morning, at breakfast in the dining hall attached to

the kitchen, there were, to my utter surprise, about 250 people—

men, women, boys and girls sharing a superb breakfast better than

that served in many hotels in America. The director of the ship,

Lawrence Tong, came forward to receive us and take us to a dining

table. ‘Professor, you must talk to our staff immediately after the

breakfast and prayer meeting,’ he told me, adding that the famous

San Diego Bishop Reverend McKynee was going to address the gathering after my friend and I had finished our speeches. We could have a brief meeting with the Bishop, as he was going to stay for the book

exhibition. I asked him whether all the people I saw lived on the

ship. He told me the ship could accommodate 300 people on board,

and all of them were volunteers who had come to sell and distribute

books from across the world.

At the end of the breakfast, the crowd quickly turned their chairs to face the speaker’s podium. After a 10-minute prayer, I was called

to speak. I told the audience how a country like India badly needed

books, as its Dalits, backward classes and tribals had been made to

starve for books for more than 3,000 years. As I was about to finish

my speech, Bishop McKynee arrived with his wife, sister and entourage. It was a pleasure to listen to his eloquent speech, which was more about liberation than salvation. After he completed his talk,

Sam Paul and I had the privilege of discussing with him the problems of Dalit-Bahujans in India and AfricanAmericans in America, drawing parallels between the two.

Bishop McKynee is the vice president of Billy Graham’s Evangelical Institution. Among Americans, he is as popular as Billy Graham. I presented him with a copy of *Why I Am Not a Hindu: A Sudra Critique of Hindutva Philosophy, Culture and Political Economy,* and we all went to see the unbelievable book

exhibition that stands on board

the *Logos II.* I was told the project, called ‘Operation Mobilization’

(OM), had been started by George Verwer, British by birth. We later

met him on the ship. He had begun the project along with a small

group of friends, within a short time putting out two big ships to distribute books by sea across the world. (Interestingly, a Brahmin writer had mistaken ‘OM’ for the Hindu symbol!) ‘I realized that the sea is

the best route to reach every country and put books in the hands of

the poorest of the poor and weakest of the weak, as the largest number of countries in the world can be reached through sea more easily than through land,’ explained Verwer.

The

Logos II, along with its sister ship, *Doulos,* takes millions of books to every nook and corner of the world. They hold book exhibitions in major cities, advertised in advance by the volunteers. In some countries, 20,000 to 50,000 people visit the book exhibition

on the ship and buy books as they are sold cheap, based on the poverty level of the country in question. In addition to spiritual books, the library on *Logos II* has science, social science, engineering, technology and a range of children’s books.

These ships have taken books to people who had never seen books earlier. When a book reaches an illiterate person, he or she has

to learn to read. The OM volunteers, I am told, encourage reading

aloud of books for the benefit of illiterate people. This is where Hinduism has failed. It neither allowed the SCs, STs or OBCs to hear books read out nor to learn reading and writing for centuries.

The book ships, apart from distributing books, also work as floating culture cauldrons where volunteers from more than 50 countries live, eat and work together. There are Blacks, Browns and Whites

coming from Asia, Africa, Europe, America and Australia. The distribution of work among the volunteers is extremely fair. There is no work that women cannot do; at the same time, there is nothing that

men feel ashamed to do. From washing toilets, clothes, cleaning the

cabins to steering the ship—everybody has to do everything. The

dignity of labour is held so high that the director and the captain of

the ship too have also to work alongside the volunteers.

India as a nation has lost out because all castes cannot live together, read together or work together. There is a lot that we need to learn from *Logos II* and its culture of sacrifice, dedication and work.

After living for 24 hours on the ship, as I had to leave for North Carolina for an interview at Duke University and to participate in other meetings, I felt that I should have been a volunteer on *Logos II* for at least two years to distribute books to people at a time when

Hindutva forces are distributing trishuls to kill people under the

cover of religion.

If only books would replace weapons, the world could be a much

better place to live in.

Deccan Chronicle, *4* June 2003

40

Blacks, Science and National Pride

After I had bid farewell to the book-carrying ship

Logos II (see 39

‘Through Books, Ships and Sea’), I left for Raleigh-Durham in North

Carolina. From San Diego to Raleigh, it is a four-hour flight with a

brief stopover in Chicago. The moment I came out of the Raleigh

airport, I saw cars bearing number plates that read ‘First in Flight’. I did not at once understand what they meant.

Last year, while on a visit to Chicago, the moment I came out of a railway station I saw cars bearing on their number plates, ‘Land of

Lincoln’. I then thought that because of Lincoln’s indomitable stature, the state in which he had been born proudly mentions him as its worthy son. But what did ‘First in Flight’ mean? It was not just one

or two number plates, but every car registered in the state bore the

same logo. On enquiry, I was told that the Wright Brothers, who had

invented the aeroplane, belonged to the state! In other words, North

Carolina describes itself with pride as the state that was ‘First in

Flight’.

If we go by such proclamations of pride, Alabama should have adopted as its motto ‘Land of Martin Luther King’ as King was born

and brought up there. But so far, though Martin Luther King’s birthday is a national holiday, his own state has not become the ‘Land of King’. Racism has its own space in America even now. At the same

time, it is being fought with all the strength of the Black population,

while the Whites as a social mass positively respond to the anti-racist

struggles and discourses. Some of them even join hands with Blacks

in their day-to-day protests against racism. The multiracial bent of

the White Democrats has been part of the intellectual tradition of

Americans.

North Carolina is not only the birthplace of aeroplanes, it is the birthplace of racism too. Early import of slaves began in that state,

and slavery expanded from it. Slavery became an all-American phenomenon, then slowly acquired an international dimension. The Black labourers built the American economy bit by bit, and made it

very powerful indeed.

Many European Whites who migrated to America slowly came under the influence of the English language. Of course, Christianity

being the common religion, it also constructed a common bridge of

culture among all Americans. Consequently, they do not have diverse food cultures from state to state, as we do in India. In our country, Gujaratis are very fundamentalist vegetarians and sweetmeat-eaters; Punjabis are roti, onion and dal eaters, South Indians are basically rice eaters and prefer chillies and tamarind. But the huge

expanse of the American continent seems to have acquired a common multi-cultural food habit, with beef and bread as the staples.

I kind of discovered Timothy Kasbe, a Dalit from Maharashtra with boundless talent, now living in Raleigh. He heads the marketing section of **IBM,** one of the world's largest computer and software companies. This company sent Kasbe for the Duke **MBA** course, which is one of the costliest courses in the world. Duke University

has a very prestigious Fuqua School of Business Management that

offers specialized courses in difference forms of business management. Kasbe told me that **IBM** had paid $150,000 towards his twoyear **MBA** course fees and other expenses. He now feels proud of his prestigious **MBA** degree, thanks to his company.

The Dean's office of the School of Business Management interviewed me in its

video studio. The recording of the interview, I am told, was to be shown to all their students on the reopening day of the

university. After the interview was over, Kasbe took me to the Duke

basketball stadium and told me that the university produces worldclass basketball players. The Duke University basketball team has so far been America's best college team. Quite interestingly, all the basketball players are either Blacks or Coloured (mixed race) AfricanAmericans. There is not a single player whose height is less than seven feet. I was told that the sports department had made it a policy

to recruit only AfricanAmericans who combine both physical and

mental abilities. Normally, the sports departments of universities

compromise with academic standards where players are concerned,

but Duke University does not. Hence these AfricanAmerican youth

get the best of jobs in all companies, as they both bring laurels to

their companies in sports and work well thanks to their excellent intellect and good academic training.

In every branch of the university, AfricanAmericans get their quota of seats and they have been excelling in many fields, including medicine and business management. Probably, a society that feels guilty about the social inequality it constructed is now looking

for ways and means to remove it. In many countries, religion gives

rise to a feeling of guilt, and in many cases, a soul-searching self

certainly evolves some positive social values. Hinduism is the only

religion that never allowed its priestly caste and other social forces

closely associated with it to let in the feeling of guilt, even about the practice of untouchability, for centuries. Even now, there is no such

soul-searching among Hindus. That is one of the reasons why there

is consistent opposition to reservations for the lower castes. In sports and other cultural activities, perhaps our tribals, Dalits and OBCs

would have brought laurels to the nation, if only they were given

preference as Duke University gives to the Blacks.

All the major universities in America—including Harvard—are private universities and most of them were started as theological

centres. Subsequently, they expanded and diversified their educational structure. We must then ask why did Indian industrialists not establish good universities? We have industrialists like Birla who

make business out of temples, and have founded some educational

institutions but their philanthropy cannot be compared with that of

American tycoons.

Capitalism also should have its capitalistic welfare ethics. Within the broad framework of democracy, capitalism should establish efficient, diversified educational institutions, which can produce intellectuals of plural backgrounds. Such a positive capitalist ethics evolves in a civil societal environment where the basic consciousness of spiritual democracy expands. But Indian capitalism functions in an environment of spiritual fascism. That is the reason why its

sense of science is also very slow. Things like Illinois taking pride in Lincoln for abolishing slavery and North Carolina lauding the inventors of the aeroplane become possible when even a tobacco baron like Duke thinks of establishing an efficient university that locates

talents among all sections of the people. Science develops only in an environment where all kinds of talents have been harnessed with equal opportunities. In America, Black talent is being harnessed in every possible way.

In India, such an environment has not been created. Indian institutions think that the productive communities are not worthy enough to be promoted in every sphere of life. It is here that our scientific temper suffers a lot.

Deccan Chronicle, 2 June 2003

41

Education and the Dignity of Labour

The BJP government, through its Ministry of Human Resource Development, is making attempts to push the Hindutva agenda into school and college curricula. This agenda focuses on the inclusion of

the stories of certain aggressive Hindu heroes of different periods in

the course content. What the nation needs at this stage, however, is

not narratives of Hindu mythological figures. It needs an education

system that will inculcate a sense of the dignity of labour in the

minds of our children and youth.

Indian civil society is facing a conflict of values: on the one hand, we are in the midst of modernity governed by an expanding capitalism and on the other, very deep notions of indignity of labour have been ingrained into our beings. Building up a modern nation is not

possible without resolving this contradiction. Capitalist modernity is

conditioned by constructing social values that enhance the notion of

dignity of labour. Labour is not an abstract but a concrete process of

life. The notion of productivity and creativity is entirely dependent

on the positive thinking constructed around labour by the education

system.

Countries which worked out their philosophical foundations by constructing a strong feeling of the dignity of labour showed resilience in the process of

building up modern democratic nation-states.

The unusual success of the United States in building up its economy cannot be explained away by its imperialist exploitation alone The cementing of its internal economic system, long before it entered the global market, must be traced to the consciousness of the dignity of labour which the migrant Europeans nurtured among themselves and which the American education system powerfully inculcated at all levels. Schoolchildren were made to realize the importance of labour almost on an everyday basis. All of them were made to learn shoemaking, pottery and cleaning up the living environment. In the Indian system, these tasks are treated as menial and polluting hence at no stage are the school and college youth made to carry them out.

Because of very strong internalized brahminical thinking, even tilling, clearing weeds, cutting crops and rearing cattle and sheep are regarded as polluting.

America overcame notions of ritual purity and pollution and this had a bearing on its economic and productive culture. India, on the contrary, suffers deeply from these notions, ingrained through the *gurukula* system, and even now they are being reinforced in our curricula through various ways. Pushing more and more narratives from the Hindu classical texts onto syllabi in the name of cultural nationalism, poses an imminent danger of subverting the slowly emerging consciousness of the dignity of labour. While all priestly classes have tended to negate the dignity of labour, the Brahmin priestly class has been exceptionally vehement in doing so. One should concede the fact

that the 'past is past,' but reinforcing and revitalizing that past at a historic phase in the birth of capitalist modernity is dangerous.

'Labour is the essence of Life.' A society which negates that fact and constructs indignity around that essence of life may survive but

cannot progress. It has gone into the psyche of educated Indians that

performing physical productive labour is undignified. Such an ingrained value is closely associated with the caste system. Caste has constructed a hierarchized indignity of labour. Those who were involved in the proto-scientific process were ritually accorded the lowest caste status while those who distanced themselves from it were rewarded with higher status. The education system, through its castebased curricula, constructed a sense of dignity among those who did not soil their hands and indignity around those who did. In the process, what was forgotten was that soiling hands is an essential aspect of development. Nationalism that negates development is no nationalism at all.

There was no need to construct labour and spirituality as antithetical to each other—but that they have been so constructed is a fact and part of our history. The future depends on how we resolve

this conflict and travel on a different path toward progress. The education system must play a crucial role in this.

Caste culture has conditioned our day-to-day life in many ways, down to and including food habits. In post-Independence India some

of our habits and moorings are undergoing a change. For example,

food habits are getting radically reformulated. By constantly raising

the issue of banning beef, the BJP-Shiv Sena combine wants to roll

back the change. No ruler in the country has yet made an attempt to

propagate the significance of the dignity of labour.;The Andhra

Pradesh Chief Minister, N. Chandrababu Naidu, through his 'Janmabhumi'

programme, sent some signals of an intention to reframe the notions of indignity of labour without, however, going so far as to

properly link it to the dignity of labour. Gandhi attempted to propagate the concept of ‘bread labour’ and self-help. However, he never examined the relationship between productive labour and dignity.

A major debate on the historical significance of labour started in the international community with the writings of Marx and Engels.

As Rossiter puts it, ‘Marx’s deepest and most imposing thought [was

that] labour is the essence of life’. Engels is more precise: ‘Labour is the source of wealth ... It is the prime basic condition for all human

existence, and this is to such an extent that, in essence, we have to

say that labour is man himself.’ In Western societies of course, after

feudalism there has always been some kind of theory of labour, while

on the contrary in India there has been a lot of Hindutva writing that

has delegitimized labour in order to sustain the ideology of caste.

The removal of carcasses to protect the health of the villages, peeling off the skin, converting it into leather, defending the villages from external threats, rearing cattle and cultivation involve systematically designed labour processes. The Hindutva education system has delegitimized the historical significance of all these labour processes.

Even the modern state system has not recognized the damage being done to our national psyche and development and remains

indifferent to injecting the dignity of labour into our psyche. To develop an economy, it is necessary to create a psychological condition wherein a person who labours to produce feels proud of his/her work

and a parasite should feel that he/she is a burden on producers. Such

a feeling must become part of childhood identity-formation. To

achieve this goal, the course content of our primary education should

change entirely. Perhaps, part of the malady lies in our higher education system, which has never ventured to theorize the question of the dignity of labour and its impact on national development.

The higher education system—whether of the natural or social sciences—did not deconstruct superstitious and mythical values.

Each experiment in the laboratory or on the field is seen in disjunction from our productive labour. Most of our scientists and social scientists construct their relationship to their discipline in total disjunction with their day-to-day life processes. This situation has to

change. We should, perhaps, take a leaf from Amartya Sen's pages of

economic and educational theory and combine welfarism with dignity of labour. As Professor Sen has done, not only economics but every branch of the social and natural sciences must relate themselves to education. The centrality of the Indian education system must be the dignity of labour.

A capitalist argument put forth by the Indian elite is that expanding markets and the service sector will draw more and more middle class/upper caste people into the work culture. The work culture in

these sectors does reframe our notions of indignity of labour because

such a discourse in India has begun to locate itself in productive

white-collar work. Millions of youth who drop out from schools and

colleges and remain idle refuse to work on the fields or take up artisan occupations, simply because of the notion that an 'educated person should not do such undignified tasks'. Withdrawal of otherwise better equipped persons from productive work leads to a collapse of

the system itself.

The Hindutva notion of mythology-centred education certainly aids and abets this process of withdrawal by millions of youth from

productive work because in no mythological narrative does productive work find a respectable place. The Hindutva forces must realize that religion is not a substitute for economy. Our school and college

students should know more about the history of the production of

rice, wheat, meat and milk than the history of wars between different

kings.

The Hindu, 2 November 1998

42

Reservations: Experience as Framework of Debate

I am one of those who became a lecturer in Political Science under the OBC reserved quota in Osmania University. Given the unwritten

laws of patronage and access that determine who gets jobs in our institutions, my first class MA, subsequent M Phil and several publications in allIndia journals would not have brought me a job but for the reservation. In my university, out of 1,200 teachers about 160

became teachers only because of reservations to OBCs, SCs and STs.

Apart from the job, what is it that the reservation in education gave

us? Quite possibly at the time of entering the university I was not as

meritorious as many of my upper caste friends were in terms of scoring marks', as the medium of instruction was English and I had studied in Telugu-medium rural schools. So in terms of presenting the answers in English I was definitely at a disadvantage when compared

to those who came from urban public schools.

But as a student of Political Science my advantage was my knowledge of the rural and village polity; the rural economy and rural people and a close personal understanding of how power operates in

everyday life. I kept comparing the political theories that I was studying with the village political structures, the class and caste systems that I was very familiar with. My frequent visits to my village and constant living in iniquitous caste cultures made me realize that the political systems of India and the world were operating on the same plane as the caste and class politics in my village. Seats through reservations in the colleges and universities to the majority of the Sudra youth who have not had education for centuries, whose parents were illiterate, to whom books were never known at home, definitely opened up a new world. When I first entered a degree college for BA, scraping through my PUC with biological sciences, opening the first pages of history, political science was really the opening of new windows to the knowledge of the West. Indeed, the renaissance of the rural masses—the SC, ST and Backward Classes—in a way began with the implementation of reservations (which began in 1967 in Andhra Pradesh). Many of my friends managed to get into university after having gone through school, living in social welfare hostels. For them it was the beginning of a new hope, a new life. In spite of the fact that poverty was haunting them there was the hope that they would get a job soon. Their parents were counting the days when they would see their children come home with degrees.

Later, in the course of my intensive study of Indian history, I realized that for those boys, the thrill of receiving an urban education was no different from the

excitement of those Indians who went to

England to study during the British period. In the Indian system,

even under British rule, those families commanded respect; their fathers were lawyers or employees of the British government or businessmen of considerable social stature, whereas for the boys who came from SC, BC families particularly, from barber, dhobi, potter, or

shepherd (called Kuruma) communities, studying at Hyderabad in

the early 1960s and 1970s was as momentous and important an experience as studying at London during the British period.

What impact does such a rural renaissance have on the village system? Our parents kept talking about the children who were studying in the state capital. Those who got into medical or engineering courses became an important focus of discussion at the time when

people came together at festivals or marriages. Every poor BC, SC

and ST mother was dreaming of educating her growing child. She

hoped they would become like those of us who were then studying

in the big cities. The Hindu superstitious values that Sudras, particularly untouchables, were suffering from were being dispelled. The wearing of trousers and bush-shirts, which was a privilege of the sons

of landlords, Brahmins and Banias, spread to these families. The

landlords' sons occasionally mingled with those boys who were in

the colleges, though their parents desisted from such an interaction.

It was really an experience to go through this change. The first day

my brother and I wore trousers and bush-shirts was a festive day in

our house. My mother and father who were only used to wearing

dhotis and saris above the knees saw us in the new garb, with the new

dhotis and saris above the knees saw us in the new garb, with the new

brightness and the new wisdom which they could never dream of.

Their clothes and lifestyles were the ones that had survived for generations. The clothes that we began to wear shook the basis of caste culture and backward living. But even this was brutally resisted by

the landlords as this new dress was seen by these caste groups as a

threat to their cultural hegemony.

When I talk about our illiterate parents I am not even for a moment suggesting that they were unskilled people. One need not be sorry to have been born in such families. For example, my mother

was an expert wool-thread maker; she was an expert seed culler and

sower and planter. My father was an expert sheep-breeder. Each caste

group acquired lot of skills in its own sphere. More than anything

else, they were and are great human beings who in spite of their economic difficulties would not let a newcomer or a passerby go hungry.

Their skills and human qualities went unrecognized by the ‘meritorious’ educated society. The contempt of the ‘meritorious’ toward our people comes through very clearly, when they resort to sweeping

roads and polishing boots. The contempt of the ‘democratic’ press

also comes through in its cartoons.

As a first student who entered the degree college from my village (my village consisted entirely of Sudras except for two families of Baniyas who were petty traders) I know what a telling impact it

had on the entire village. As there was no landlord to envy me, so

many people celebrated my joining the college! Almost in every

second family, wife and husband had heated debates about sending

second family, wife and husband had heated debates about sending

their children to school and college as my mother had. To some extent I was fortunate because I did not have to contribute to the family income like many boys of my age group because my family was relatively better off. My family was in a position to spend some

money on my education. But that does not mean all those who were

in similar economic position sent their children to school. In fact,

more than money, culture was coming in our way.

I would not have got a seat in a BA course with my third class PUC

certificate. The others with whom I was competing were the sons of

landlords in my district who by then (1971) had established urban

residences only to educate their children. Apart from the landlords

there were Brahmins and Baniyas who had the background of education and employment in the state sector, or the income from temples or from comfortably-off businesses. So at that stage of training and

knowledge I could not have got better marks than what I got in PUG.

But it was not only the village that changed. I did not remain what I was after joining the degree course. I opted for English as one of

my subjects only to learn English and began to develop hopes that I

should make it into the IAS. For that there were two reasons. One

was that an SC person (Madhava Rao) was our district collector. He

was said to have been helping the SCs and BCs a lot at that time. As

the collector's residence and office were adjacent to my degree college I would see the queues of SCs and BCs in front of Madhava Rao's residence every day. Second, one of my teachers was not only

an admirer of Madhava Rao but was also trying to encourage us to

emulate the collectors and help the people. This teacher whom I was

referring to was a Brahmin who himself missed the IAS bus. Unlike

many Brahmin teachers he never thought that attending to the problems of the SCs and BCs and helping them in small ways made Madhava Rao a bad collector. So I was determined that I should

make it to the IAS and started working in the Warangal regional library from morning to evening. During this time, I did some intense reading of Marx and Engels as only these two thinkers appeared to

be talking about things related to my village and the classes that

were around us. Only in their writings did I find that the all-powerful

landlords of our area were being portrayed as villains. My feelings

about the landlord were right there in their theory of exploitation.

On Sundays when I was in the village I conducted classes for my illiterate and semi-literate village friends in the teashops and at my

residence, telling them about the changes that were coming in the

Soviet Union and China. I still remember that when we conducted a

class in the village school on the changes in Europe and India many

illiterate village elders, their sons, peasants, even some schoolchildren belonging to all castes attended it. After the talk was over, I remember how many peasants belonging to Backward Classes and

SCs told me that they were determined to send their children to

school. Thus education became a dream for them. This dream began

because here was a person who came from their neighbouring family,

who bore their name and had now become knowledgeable. They felt

who bore their name and had now become knowledgeable. They felt

that it was not impossible to see their own child also become knowledgeable like this person. With the reservations higher education was brought down to the SC, ST and BC *wadas.* This was like Hegel bringing God from heaven to earth. Earlier education in almost all

the villages had been restricted to the Brahmins, Banias and landlords and these people were distinct from the rest. Their children had no interaction with the working class masses.

We must remember the fact that the socalled renaissance that took place in the nineteenth century during the time of the British

rule was confined to the non-Sudra upper castes and in our state it

was extended only to a few Sudra upper castes like Reddys and

Kammas. However, with reservations being extended to OBCs in

1967 educational change was visible. So far as the rural Backward

Classes were concerned this was the beginning of their renaissance.

In certain parts of the country because of the conversions of SCs to

Christianity there was some spread of education, but the Backward

Classes remained completely untouched. Not that all of them were

absolutely poor. Some caste groups had some land; some were relatively better off than their artisan brethren. But educationally they were far more backward than the Christian SCs. The Sudra caste

groups (except Reddys, Vellamas and Kammas) in Andhra Pradesh

used to think that they were not destined to enter educational institutions. Educational institutions were the places of Brahmins, Doras and Banias giving currency to the proverb ***Manama Brahmanulama Komatlama Chaduvukonul*** (Are we Brahmins or Banias to go to

schools?)

schools?)

After I was educated and employed, the attempts of several families from my village to educate their children gained momentum. It is as a result of such attempts that a boy called Sambaiah became an

engineer, getting a seat in engineering in the reserved quota. He did

extremely well in studies. Some SC and OBC boys completed their

inter and degree courses and found jobs. One OBC boy became a

teacher. Two Kapu boys completed their PG courses and subsequently one is engaged in research. The fact remains that now the whole village looks at education as one of the vehicles for social

change. I gave up the hope of becoming an IAS officer as I was not

willing to go for trials. I am sure I would not have got it as no single OBC person from Andhra Pradesh has made it into the IAS so far. Instead I turned to research in rural political economy, civil liberties, ancient India and so on, along with my teaching job.

The point is that if there is no reservation for OBCs in the allIndia services hardly any rural OBCs can compete with urban, public school products. We can only compete with those whose backgrounds are similar to ours, whose cultural experiences are similar to ours. Having come from iniquitous backgrounds, iniquitous cultures,

speaking languages which have been reduced to ‘dialects’, differing

from others in our whole upbringing, it is just not possible for us to

compete in tests even if some economic facilities are provided.

The Indian village system is ridden with caste hierarchy. In my childhood and school days dining with other caste groups was hierarchically prohibited. For example, the potters used to consider themselves superior to Kurumas (shepherds and wool weavers); the Kurumas used to consider themselves superior to Goudas (toddy tappers); Padmashalis, Dhobis and Barbers, and so on. Each higher caste avoided dining in the house of the lower. But with the spread

of education friends started dining in each other's houses. In the beginning our parents grumbled and said that we were polluting caste culture.

We in turn started telling them about what this caste institution was

and how we were divided by the upper castes into all kinds of caste

groups. But the resistance to allowing our SC friends to sit with us

and dine with us used to be strong. Even now the resistance continues. But we were taking risks. Our SC friends who dressed like us were made to sit with us and eat with us. I remember how my mother

would scold us when we dined with an SC friend called Samuel.

Particularly with college education making a presence in the villages through reservation, educated youth began to understand the importance of the class factor very clearly. The caste system began to

lose its hold. The Backward Classes began to look at the Reddy landlord, the Brahmin patwari and the Bania shaukar as inimical forces.

College dropouts went back to settle down in the villages. They began to resist landlord atrocities, began to oppose the patwari's hegemony, and to keep the village Bania in check. These educated youth began to demand political power: in Telengana where the Naxalite

movement is strong, quite a number of young people from the Backward Classes rallied round the Naxalite groups and fought against the landlord-patwari hegemony. Though untouchability continues to

keep the SCs and OBCs separate even today, the Backward Classes

are forging themselves into a class force. Wherever Naxalite groups

are strong the SC-OBC unity also seems possible because of educated

and motivated youth. The Dalit movement tried to strengthen this

unity further. College and university education has played, and is

playing, a very important role. But for reservation this change would

have been impossible.

In Andhra Pradesh the 1986 antireservation agitation strengthened the class unity of Backward Classes, SCs and STs. The slow movement of rural masses from caste consciousness to class consciousness is a very significant social change and this is closely related to the system of reservations.

In contrast, for the upper castes, particularly those who are agitating against reservations, education is only a means of ensuring a comfortable life. For those who have been educated for generations

a college seat does not mean social change, it does not mean a massive stir in cultural values. It is one of the methods to add to existing comforts. The 49.5 percent reservation to us (BCs, SCs and STs put

together) is, therefore, seen by them as taking away the comforts of

49.5 percent of upper castes. But for us it is an altogether different

matter. For us it is a source through which all our relatives and friends will get in touch with education, through which some of the villagers

can get medical treatment for some complicated diseases.

It is true that with a job in the state sector our living conditions would improve. Some of us may long for these comforts but more

important by far is the way the changes shake our historical and cultural backwardness. It also gives us new confidence. This is something the antireservationists do not want to consider; they do not want to see this as a process of national development. They speak of

efficiency, but they do not want to face up to the fact that an ‘efficiency’ that does not address itself to the problems of the masses of the nation is no efficiency at all.

They say that this breeds casteism. The upper castes have been keeping caste consciousness in circulation through institutions like

temples, through politics, and through nepotism. What does it mean to say that only a Brahmin can-become a priest and none else? When you use caste suffixes to your names what is happening to caste? The upper caste forces have evolved various mechanisms to keep caste alive and kicking. But when the reservation system puts several caste groups together to portray them as a class, they turn around and say you are perpetuating caste. When the communists talk about class and class struggles the upper caste intellectuals turn around and say 'this is a country of castes but not of classes'. When the government grants castebased reservations to socially and educationally Backward Classes they turn around to say 'you must provide class-based reservations'. Their philosophy is simple: whichever idiom disturbs their comforts they will turn around to evoke the other. This is nothing but Kautilyanism. Reservation in fact is one of the instruments to annihilate caste. This is an economical and educational means to destroy caste bit by bit.

Ever since the Prime Minister announced the implementation of the Mandal Commission recommendations granting 27 percent jobs to OBCs in the central services the question of merit has been made out to be a big issue. All kinds of theories circulate around it. The antireservationists, including students and intellectuals of Left and Right political moorings, se^m to think that 'merit' is the most sacrosanct thing in this country. They seem to take it for granted that some unilaterally defined entity called merit is the most important factor in the nation's economic and political life. These theoreticians cite three areas where 'merit' has to be guarded — the administrative

cite three areas where "merit" has to be guarded—the administrative,

the medical and the scientific, and the engineering services. It must

be noted that each class defines merit in its own interest. This is true not only of merit but also things such as beauty, honour, excellence,

and so on. We need to debunk the present theory of merit which

makes for a relative position in rank based on marks obtained

through written examination. Securing good marks in all such examinations depends to a large extent on having the advantage of educated parents, availability of books and coaching at a young age. If BC, SC and ST students get lower marks than the upper class/caste

students this does not mean that they have less intelligence or capacity to learn.

For transforming a society like ours what is the contribution of merit? Can merit be delinked from culture, development and ultimately from social change? Was Gandhi, who narrowly escaped academic failure each time, less meritorious than those who scored 85

to 90 percent marks only to become money-minded lawyers? Was he

less meritorious than a person who makes it into the IAS by scoring

90 percent, only to treat that job as a cozy comfortable position? If

marks and writing is the criterion to decide merit, Ambedkar was far

more meritorious than either Gandhi and Nehru. Instead of entering

into a Vedic *mimamsa* on merit we shall look at the issue from the point of view of the masses who are the subjects of social change.

This is necessary because today almost every political party, at least

overtly, accepts that there is a need for social change and accepts that the administration has to be oriented towards that change.

Indian administrators are supposed to bring about social change to which the

Indian administrators are supposed to bring about social change to which the Indian Constitution is committed. Social change in essence means improving the living conditions of the backward masses, the SCs, STs BCs and minorities. What is it that an administrator is required to do in order to bring about this social change? To change caste inequalities, we require a person who can understand

the humiliation that the caste institution confers on some. He should

know how it operates, understand it sensitively and feel that it should

go. To achieve this goal, who is better suited for the job? Can one

who has benefited from the caste system do this job? Surely one who

suffered from this system can do the job better? Leaving aside the

opportunists that come from this background, by and large all those

who are educated from this background hate to be maltreated. And

hence they will wish to work against the caste system.

The second thing that the civil servant is expected to do is to change land relationships in an agrarian society like ours. There are

landlords and there are landless masses. The government has to distribute the land to the landless, having uncompromisingly acquired it from the landlords. Except in a few states by and large the landlords belong to the upper castes and the landless belong to the SCs, STs and Backward Classes. In this situation which officer will be able

to do this job effectively? Obviously one who has some sympathy for

the landless poor. The sons and daughters of the present bureaucrats

come from the Banjara Hill bungalows (a posh locality in

Hyderabad) whose parents either have no roots in the village system

or even if they do are among the landlord families. They have little

interest in pushing such changes through. But the masses are expecting (the Constitution has been promising) something different from these administrators. To run such an administrative system what is

the need for advanced knowledge of English? What is actually

needed is commitment, experience, the ability to co-ordinate things.

Do not all these things come to people who are educated in the native languages? If you scrutinize the issue carefully, scoring high marks is directly related to acquiring proficiency in English. At this

juncture of development and underdevelopment of the country, of

what use to us is the mere ‘merit’ of marks and of proficiency in

English?

In all offices we must have people who have acquired the basic skills of reading and writing and doing the necessary arithmetic, and

who can moreover do all this in a language which is understood by

the masses. In this whole process what is needed most is the necessary commitment to and sympathy with the masses. In the teaching profession, more than elsewhere we require people who have sympathy with the rural students and their problems. Otherwise there will not be any difference between British officers and teachers and the

‘Indian-English’ ones. Thus our administrative structures and our development have to be geared towards change and that change is related to Backward Classes, SCs and STs and minorities. Therefore, those officers who come from these groups will do a better job.

Medical and engineering courses are being shown as thrown into the hands of meritless people with the coming of reservations. These

professions are said to be the ones that need a lot of skill. The argument is that those who get lower marks in this training, if they become doctors and engineers our patients will die and our bridges will fall down soon. This is an argument which appears to be correct on

which appears to be correct on

the face of it. But the absurdity of the argument has to be seen in the

context of the life of the rural masses.

Let us just turn to the rural reality to understand this question.

Let us begin with engineering. The development of engineering

skills did not fall from heaven. They are acquired through a process

of training and experience. Who nurtured the engineering skills in

our villages for hundreds of years? Take for example the metallurgic

engineering skills that developed in Indian villages. Even now in

our villages the peasants take the iron rods to an ironsmith and ask

him to make all kinds of tools like sickles, axe, knives, bullock cartwheel bars, and so on. How does the ironsmith do this? Only by applying systematic skills in heating the iron to a particular temperature, by beating it with a particular force and by cooling it in

a particular order. These skills are part of engineering skills. Now

suppose the son of an ironsmith with some education but lower marks

in English or Chemistry than the boy who is born in a Brahmin family becomes a metallurgic engineer—might he not make a better metallurgic engineer? Why after all would a person become an engineer in this field? Is it to improve the rural and urban people's living conditions or not? Why does one turn to research in engineering? In

order to improve the rural conditions of Indian people does one have

to go to the USA for research or to the Indian villages again?

The other day I learnt from a woman scientist who had been studying old sites, that till 1920 in districts like Nizamabad and

Karimnagar, wootz steel was being manufactured out of iron ore available in that region. The steel that was being made there was being exported to Persia only to be converted into beautiful swords to be

sold in the entire European market. Some of these wootz swords are

to be seen even in the Salarjung Museum at Hyderabad.

Who after all were these steel-makers? They hailed from a caste called 'yanadees' (ignorant people). According to this scientist,

they had developed a remarkable knowledge of the metal ores

available in these areas as well as of the physical and geological

characteristics of the region. They had developed crucibles of such

shape and quality that they could withstand the 1000°C heat required for smelting the steel for 24 hours. Several extremely sophisticated engineering calculations had gone into converting the clay into a crucible wall. A lot of skills had gone into preparing the

charcoal and the furnaces in order to heat the ore-stones and separate the steel from the ore. Yet all these people were called yanadees. I am sure the children of these yanadees would not have

been able to compete with those children who studied in cosy public schools who were trained for a long time to read and write to meet the requirements of examinations. But if they had got into an

engineering course, would they not have become good engineers

irrespective of the marks that they secured?

Many of our farmers have scientific skills. They know when it will rain. They can tell us which natural signals prefigure certain climatic changes. They know where a bridge should be built in order to serve a larger area. If a person who comes from these peasant families were to acquire some basic training in organizing knowledge and formulating hypotheses he would definitely make a more useful engineer in the agrarian sector than a boy who has spent his time in urban centres. Does it really matter whether the peasant's son got

about seniors. Does it really matter whether the peasant's son got

relatively lower marks if he fulfils the basic requirement? The real

tragedy of engineering in this country is that it is separated from the

people's needs, people's knowledge and their environment. The

government constructs bridges only to fulfil electoral promises. The

relatives of the ministers become contractors. To each one of them

making some illegal money becomes the main issue. All these socalled meritorious engineers have been issuing false certificates to contractors in order to make some easy money. Nowhere in this

whole process does 'merit' come into the picture. In what way would

reservation dilute merit? What an engineer needs more than anything else is concern for people and knowledge about the environment along with some basic skills.

Let its no now turn to medicine. Who contributed to the development of medical sciences in India? In developing the Unani and Ayurvedic medicines the peasants, artisan groups and tribals contributed a lot. The nomadic tribes like Kurumas and Banjaras have known of a number of plants which have medical value. Peasants

laboured to know what mixture of leaves gives rise to which particular medicine. They were the ones who discovered how to patch up the broken bones of a human being or an animal by tightly folding

particular types of wooden plates around the broken leg. Even today

many of our village artisans are experts in these clinical operations.

They were the ones who learnt to cure some diseases by cauterizing

a particular part of the body with a particular rod in a particular fashion. All our modern medical practices emerged from these techniques. In fact the priestly class of India was always against these medical practices. The brahminical class had developed the theory

that touching a dead body results in pollution which actually hampered the development of our medical sciences. If the Sudras are to say that since even now priesthood is fully reserved to Brahmins only

on the basis of caste, then medicine should also be fully reserved to

Sudras on the basis of caste, what is wrong with that argument? Practical medicine was the profession of Sudras. Do the Brahmins agree to the proposal that there should be an examination for priesthood

and only such ‘meritorious’ persons as get more marks should become priests?

It is this ideological hegemony of the Brahmins that is giving them a political advantage. Hence the theory of ‘merit’ is a myth

that they are pursuing now only to advance their self-promotion.

The Sudra masses never lacked the skills. If we strictly go by their

skills in engineering, medical and agricultural professions the Sudras

should inherit the engineering, medical, agricultural courses. What

the Sudra masses actually lack as against the Brahmins, Kshatriyas

and Vaishyas is training in reading and writing and this has been violently denied to them throughout history. Even today the antireservationists are defining ‘merit’ based on this single skill of reading and writing. This is absolutely unscientific.

When it comes to the question of reservations for the OBCs in education and employment the argument should not be reduced to

who has merit in securing marks. Nor does it have to be viewed from

the point of view of the Mandal Commission’s recommendations. It

should be seen from the point of view that for centuries, in spite of

acquiring skills in all kinds of professions, the Sudra masses were

denied education. Protective discrimination has got to be based on

caste. This option becomes necessary because we have not opted for

a scientific socialist system where castes and classes would have

slowly been destroyed in the process of providing full and compulsory education and employment to all.

Those of us who acquired education and employment through reservation feel that this process is inevitable. By liberating the

Sudra masses from their social and educational backwardness we

would be contributing a lot to diluting caste rigidities. This process

certainly would go a long way in social transformation within the

framework of liberal polity. At the same time we must remember that

revolutionary options for destroying caste and class institutions are

different. And those options would have different implications for

society. But social change cannot simply wait till revolution comes.

Reservations for the OBCs, SCs, STs and women have to be seen as a

part of this process of social change within the democratic polity.

Economic and Political Weekly, 13 October 1990

Index

Adivasis,

xx, 7, 10-12, 53, 58, 60, 61, 69-70, 110-11, 129, 141, 143, 156
Advani, L.K., 13, 14, 71, 125, 149
Afghanistan, 19, 20, 23, 92, 107, 148
ahimsa, 54, 58
All India Christian Council, 105

Ambedkar, B. R., ***x, xxviii,*** 43

and Buddhism, 37-38, 41, 58, 59, 105, 111, 151
and the Constitution. *See* Constitution of India
life of, 37-39, 157
Muslim attitudes to, 11
political thought of, 39, 65, 105, 112,128-30
and secularism, 51, 59, 77
statues of, 40, 41, 85
upper caste criticism of, 40-43, 46, 50
America, 3, 8, 28
and Blacks, 30, 31-34, 73, 139, 181-87
and the bomb, 56
and the church, 21, 101
civil society of, 28-30
and India, 27-30
and Iraq, 19-22
and terrorism, 23-25,
Anjaiah, Guda, 45
Aryanis,/Aryans, ***xx-xxi, xxiv, xxxi,*** 142-43
Ayodhya, 1-4, 14, 15, 40, 54, 130,

149, 150

Babri Masjid.

See Ayodhya
Bahujan Republican Party, 48

Bahujan Samaj Party, 14, 41, 128
Bajrang Dal, ***xviii***
Bangladesh, 92, 107
Besant, Annie, 126
Bhagavad Gita, ***xx-xxii, xxix,*** 6-8, 14, 41, 43, 58, 69
Bhakti movement, 11
Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), 24
electoral strategies of, 123, 125,

128, 130
leadership of 2, 7, 13, 14, 158
and nuclear bomb, 53-56
social policies of, xv, 24, 55-56,

107, 141, 144, 147, 163, 184
Bharatiya Mahila Seva Samiti, 82
Bharti, Uma, 14,15
Bible, ***xv-xtv, xx, xxix-xxx,*** 8, 21, 25, 169
Birk, G. D., 182
Blacks
culture of, 29-30, 32-34, 163-72,

180-83
political struggles of, 38, 70, 74,

139
Blair, Tony, 20, 21,91
Brahmins. ***See*** varna
Brahminism, ***xix, xxiv,*** 42, 46, 59, 61,

92, 98, 114, 117
Britain, 12, 19, 20, 22, 59, 70, 73-74,

77, 90-93, 169, 172
Buddhism
and Ajatashatru, 54-55
and Ambedkar. ***See*** Ambedkar,

B. R.
and Ashoka, ***xix,*** 55,148

conversion to, 1, 16, 41, 43, 91,

105-06, 113, 130
democracy in, ***xiv-xv,*** 77, 110,

114-16
persecution of, 146-51
buffaloes, ***xxvii, xxx,*** 71, 139,141-43
Bukhari, Syed Ahmad, 150
Burma, 55
Bush, George W,, 20, 21

Carey, William, 12, 156
caste system, 2, 42, 57, 59, 86-87,

93, 175-76, 185-86. ***See also*** Hinduism
castes, 58, 69, 94
Alberuni on, 11
Bania, ***xxx,*** 97, 157, 173, 189, 192, 193, 199
Chakkali, 58
Chandala, ***xx,*** 7,11, 53, 58, 60, 61, 103, 123, 141, 143, 173
Golla, 84
Jats, 63
Kamma, 46, 48, 63, 86, 87, 88, 192
Kuruma, 189
Kshatriya. ***See*** varna
Madiga, 58, 96
Mala, 44, 58, 96
Mangala, 58
Marathas, 63
Patel, 63
Reddy, 46, 48, 63, 81-82, 84-87,

88, 192, 193, 199
upper castes. ***See*** upper castes

Vellama, 47,48, 87, 88,192
and women, sexuality of, 81-84,

87-89. ***See also*** women

Yadav, ***xxii,*** 7, 139
China, 27, 30, 53, 55, 56, 145, 191
Christians, ***xxiii, xxix,*** 19-21, 24, 108
atrocities against, 126
Christianity, ***xiv-xvi, xxii,*** 23-24
communalization of, 6, 8, 110
civil society of, 20, 29, 76, 77, 145
conversion to, 91, 101, 103, 104,

107
democracy in, 77, 110-11, 114-16
and Gujarat, 1,10-12
citizenship, 123-26
civil society, and caste, 37-38, 58,103
conditions for formation, 5, 7,

28-30
and religion, 20, 109
and terrorism, 19-21, 25
Clinton, Bill, 20,173-76
Coca Cola, 49
colonialism, ***xxviii-xxx,*** 57, 59, 91, 94, 142-43, 155-56,163-72,189
Columbia, University of, 27, 138
communism, ***xvii,*** 12, 16, 24, 44-45, 46, 65-66,77, 79,169,174,193
Constitution of India, 8, 37-39, 51, 52, -63, 71, 132, 195
Congress Party, 13, 15, 16, 24, 58, 79, 125-26, 147
conversion. ***See*** Buddhism; Christianity
Corbyn, Jeremy, 90, 92-93
cows, ***xxvi-xxviii, xxxi,*** 71, 137-39, 141-43
Culas, Irene and Eugene, 90

Dalit-Bahujans,

xvii-xx, 24. ***See also*** Hinduism; OBCs
atrocities against, 81-89, 137-38
and Buddhism, 105-06, 108
and buffaloes, ***xxiii, xxix,*** 7-8
and Gujarat, 10
literature of, 44-49

and Muslims, 11
neglect of, 11, 51, 57, 63, 159-66
political strategies of, 64-65, 127-30
search for equality by, 8, 52, 63, 113, 118, 188-90
and secularism, 76, 78
traditional roles of, 1, 7, 13-14, 69, 110, 117, 173, 185, 197-98
and women, 66, 95. ***See also*** castes; women
Dalit International Conference, 177

Dalitization, 64-65, 95, 97, 120

dandaniti, 53, 58
Deendar Anjuman, 5
Duke University, 179, 181-82
Dumont, Louis, 94
Durban conference, 22-24, 28, 72-73,91, 113,170-72
dwijas. See castes, upper

education, 1,3, 11,57, 107, 118, 156-57, 169-76, 181-83, 187, 188-200
Elwin, Verrier, 156
Engels, Friedrich, 191

fascism

Hindu, ***xix-xx,*** 10, 59, 103, 114

Hitler's, ***xix-xx, xxvi,*** 24
Fernandes, George, 55

Gaddar, 43, 44-49
Gandhi, Feroze, 124
Gandhi, Indira, 124, 125, 132
Gandhi, M.K., ***xxii, xxvi,*** 30
assassination of, 40, 59
'cow' nationalism, ***xxviii***
life of, ***xxx,*** 73,157,195
philosophy of, 30, 37, 38, 52, 54,58,97, 102, 112, 125, 133
Gandhi, Sonia, 123-26, 147

Ghazni, Muhammad, 149
Gita. ***See*** Bhagavad Gita
globalization, 70, 78, 115-16, 138, 150, 155-66
Godse, Nathuram, 59
Golwalkar, M. S,, 26, 69, 111
Gorky, Maxim, 44
Graham, Billy, 21, 178
Gujarat riots, 1,10-11,12, 13-16, 80,104
Guru, Gopal, 66
Guru Granth Sahib, ***xxx***

Habib, Irfan, 11

Haimendorf, von Fürer, Christoph, 156
Harvard University, 182
Haslam, David, 90
Hegel, G. W. F., 60, 144, 191

Hinduism, ***xvi-xvii,*** 8, 59, 77, 147, 182
Ambedkar on, 37-38
and caste, 91-92, 116, 119-20. ***See also*** Dalit-Bahujans
negation of, 57
swastika and, ***xix-xx, xxiii***
violence and, ***xxi,*** 43, 53
Hindutva

and Ambedkar, 40-41

Hindutva ***(cont.)***

authoritarianism of, 4, 7, 24, 38, 60-61, 138-39
cow protection and, ***xxiv-xxv, xxxi***
hierarchies, 2, 44, 62, 69, 102
mobilizing OBCs, 1-3, 13-14
and reform, 8, 50-51, 57, 117
rhetoric of, 70, 102, 187

symbols of, ***xvii-xviii,*** 53, 104
and violence, 5-6, 10, 26, 55-56, 91, 101, 126, 140
Hume, A. O., 126
Hsun, Lu, 44

Iraq, 17, 91.

See also America
Iowa, University of, 27
Isaiah, 142, 148
Islam, ***xv-xvii***
and caste, 11, 115
civil societies in, 19-23, 25
conversion to, 91, 107, 110
democracy in, 77, 110-11, 114-16
Dalits and, 1,2, 10-13
and Gujarat, 1,10
and Taliban, 148-51
Western fear of, 9, 25-26, 92

Jaffrelot, Christophe, 59
Jainism, 58
Japan, 145
Jinnah, M. A., 133
John Paul 11, 21, 101
Joshi, Murli Manohar, 15
Judaism, 6

Kane, P.V., 102, 117
Karnath, 97
Kasbe, Timothy, 181
Kashmir, 5, 7, 55, 107
Katiyar, Vinay, 14
Kautilya, 7, 46, 58, 61, 144, 163
Arthasinistra,50, 97, 176

King, Martin Luther, Jr., 31, 33, 34, 180
Kishore, Giriraj, 2
Kosambi. D.D.. 58

Krishna, 7,41,53, 58, 114
Kumbh Mela, 144-46

bin Laden, Osama, 19
Ladenism, 23-26
Laxman, Bangaru, 7, 143
Lincoln, Abraham, 139, 180, 182
Logos II, 177-79, 180
Lohia, Ram Manohar, 42, 97

Machiavelli, Niccolo, 76
Madiga Dandora, 96
Mahavira, Vardhaman, 58
Mandal Commission Report, 64, 97
Mandal movement, 11-12, 14, 15, 46-47, 64-65, 78, 95, 131
Mandela, Nelson, 169
Manu, 7, 38, 50, 97, 137
Marx, Karl, ***xiv,*** 38,161, 191
Marxism. ***See*** communism
Mayawati, 41, 65, 130
Mbeki, Thabo, 171
McKynee, Bishop, 178
meatarianism, 64, 69, 97, 106, 157
Mishra, Ranganath, 72
Modi, Narendra, 13-16. ***See also*** Gujarat riots
Muslims, ***xxviii,*** 11-12, 145. ***See also*** Islam

Naidu, Chandrababu, 48, 120, 173, 186
Narasimha Rao, P. V., 15
Narayanan, K. R., 50-51
nationalism, ***xxvii-xxviii, xxxi,*** 41, 54,

114, 118, 156, 163, 165, 170-71,

185
spiritual, 133, 140, 141
Nehru, Jawaharlal, 37, 42, 73, 76,

157, 195
de' Nobili, Robert, 156

de Nobili, Robert, 156
NRIs, 3, 30, 74, 138

OBCs (Other Backward Classes).

See also Dalit-Bahujans
and atrocities against women, 82
and conversion, 16, 107
and Dalits, 127, 138, 140
and Gujarat riots, 10-12
on Hinduism, 38-39, 79, 130
landmarks for, 63-64
and leadership, 13-16. ***See also*** Modi, Narendra
as muscle power, ***xviii,*** 1-4, 14-15, 79, 139
and secularism, 78
Omar, Mullah Mohammed, 149
Omvedt, Gail, 160-61
Operation Mobilization (OM), 27, 178-79
Osmania University, 44, 91, 188

Pakistan, 5, 6, 23, 27, 53, 55, 56, 92,

107,132-33
panchsheel, 55, 56
Panini, 96
Parsis, 124-25
Patkar, Medha, 131
People's War Group, 47, 48
Periyar, E.V. Ramasamy, ***x,*** 64, 130
Phule, Jyotirao, 12, 64, 120, 130,

156
Presley, Elvis, 31-34
Purusha Sukta, xvii, xxvi, 7

Quran,

xv-xvi, xx, xxx, 23, 25, 115,

138, 149

Radhakrishnan, Sarvepalli, 102
Raj, Udit(Ram), 105, 108
Rama, 41, 53, 58, 114, 151
Rama Rao, N.T., 47
Ram, Kanshi, 14, 65, 130
Ram Janmabhumi, 1-3. ***See also*** Ayodhya
Rao, Madhava, 190
Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS),

xviii, xx
leadership of, 5-7, 57
policies of, 6, 75, 107, 110, 133, 145-47, 149, 174
terrorism by, 24, 41
reservation quotas, 64, 97, 131, 188-200
Rig Veda, ***xxvi,*** 7, 69, 142
Roy, Arundhati, 131
Roy, Rammohun, 12

sadhus, 144, 147

Sangh Parivar, 1, 3, 8-11, 13-15, 50-51,57, 60, 79, 104, 127
Sangma, P.A., 52
Sant Sabha, 1
sants, 3
Saraswati Shishu Mandirs, 3
Sen, Amartya, 187
Shankaracharya, 7, 3, 110, 119
Shiv Sena, 5,41,56, 186
Shourie, Arun, 40-43, 46, 50
Singh, Jaswant, 71
Singh, Kalyan, 13, 14, 111
Singh, V.P., 14
Singhal, Ashok, 2, 76
South Africa, 32, 73, 169-72
Soviet Union, 191
Sri Lanka, 6, 55
Srinivas, M.N., 95-98, 119
Sudarshan, K.S., 5, 9
Sufism, 11, 12

Sikhism, 11, 12
Swamy, G. Venkat, 40

Taliban, 148-9
temples, building of, 1-4, 144, 150
dirt in, 30
temples, building of ***(cont.)*** entry, 132
priesthood in, 7, 8, 29, 103,

119-20
terrorism, 5, 19, 20-21, 25, 91-92
Thackeray, Bal, 5, 138
Thoreau, Henry David, 58
Tilak, Bal Gangadhar, ***xx,*** 54, 133
Togadia, Praveen, 2

United Kingdom.

See Britain

United Nations, 11, 72-73
United States. ***See*** America
upper castes, ***xvii, xix-xx,*** 2, 5, 29, 30
and labour, 125, 155, 162-63, 165, 184-86
political strategies, 16, 65-66, 77,

124, 127-79, 155-57
racism, experience of, 73
recipients of service, 7, 45, 141, 176
social distance, 60, 69, 104, 120
women, attitude to, 81-89
Utrecht, University of, 22

Vajpayee, Atal Bihari, 7, 13, 15, 51,

71, 76, 101, 110, 124, 125
varna, ***xxiv***
Brahmins, ***xx, xxiv, xxx,*** 8, 15-16,

58-59, 69, 127. ***See also*** Brahminism

Kshatriya, 7, 63, 70, 81, 124, 199
Sudra, ***xx,*** 2 ,7, 11, 41, 57, 58, 60,

61, 95, 103, 123, 141, 143, 173,

189
Vaishya, 7, 81
varnadharma, 7, 75, 93
Venkatachalaiah, M.N., 52
Vinaya Pitaka, xxx
Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP),

leadership of, 2, 3, 76
policies at home, ***xviii, xx,*** 7, 40,

75, 76, 105, 107, 131, 138
policies abroad, 11, 30
Vivekananda, 42, 111
Voice of Dalits International, 90, 92
vote banks, 6

war, ***xxi,*** 5-8, 19-21
Winfrey, Oprah, 33
Wisconsin, University of, 27
women
atrocities on, 82-83, 88-89
Black success, 33, 174
control of, 48-49, 81-89
as Dalits, 81-82, 87-88
dowry and, 86-87
in industry, 174
inter-caste marriages, 86
as mothers, 45
and religion, ***xvi,*** 114, 115
and sexuality, 81-89
‘speaking differently’, 66, 70
as upper caste, 81-82, 87, 88”, 95
Women’s Reservation Bill, 126
World Bank, 165

Yadav, Laloo Prasad, 15, 65, 129
Yadav, Mulayam Singh, 15, 65
Yadav, Sharad, 65

Buffalo Nationalism

A Critique of Spiritual Fascism

‘O Mother Lachumamma, your blouse is torn, Your hair is soiled, your sari in rags, You have no money to buy new ones. Even in that condition what have you done? You planted saplings, walking backwards like a bull, In order to produce food from the mud.’

Kancha Ilaiah translates these words of the Telugu poet, singer, activist Gaddar to emphasize the productivity of the ordinary people, the Dalit-Bahujans of India, who receive so little in return, deprived of the gains of development and globalization but not of the losses in their wake. Arguing forcefully for social justice, this book contains a selection from Kancha Ilaiah’s columns in popular newspapers like *The Hindu*, the *Deccan Herald*, the *Deccan Chronicle*, the *Hindustan Times* among others, and journals like *Mainstream* and the *Economic and Political Weekly*.

Strongly advocating the Dalitization of Indian society that will undo its moorings in spiritual fascism, which refuses equality or freedom to the majority, he commends the positive values of the buffalo as a productive animal that epitomizes the qualities of the Dalit-Bahujans. Among the many issues he tackles are the right to conversion, the role of the OBCs as providing muscle power to the Hindutva forces, the imperative need for the spread of English amongst all castes and for reservation quotas in education and employment, on globalization and gender. Combative, heartfelt, intellectually rigorous, these pieces present his vision of a more just society.

Kancha Ilaiah is Professor and Head, Department of Political Science, Osmania University, Hyderabad, and an activist in the Dalit-Bahujan and civil liberties movement.

cover design Rish Barua
illustration Soumitra Chatterjee cover printer Roman Printers

ISBN 81-85604-69-X
Rs 200